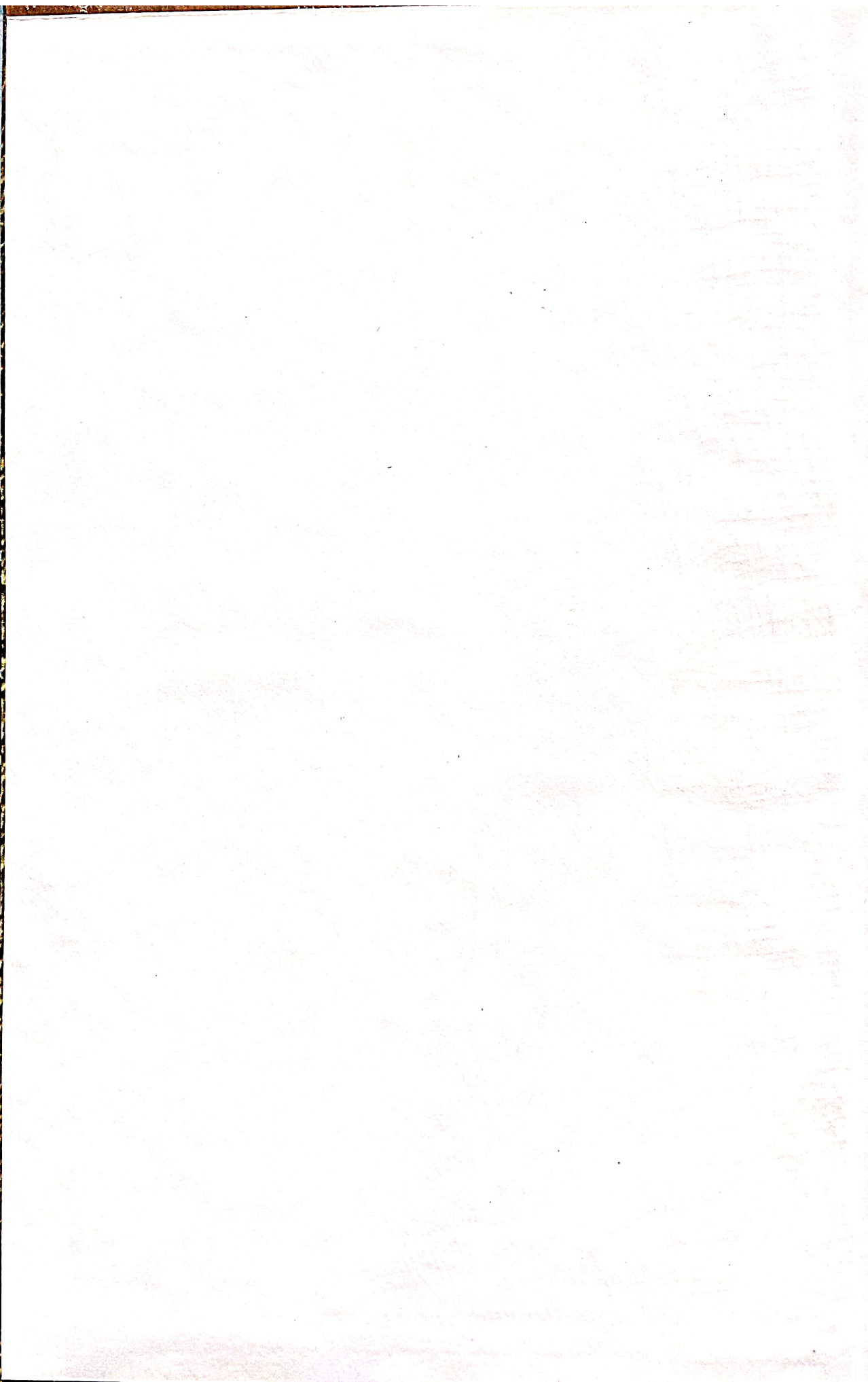
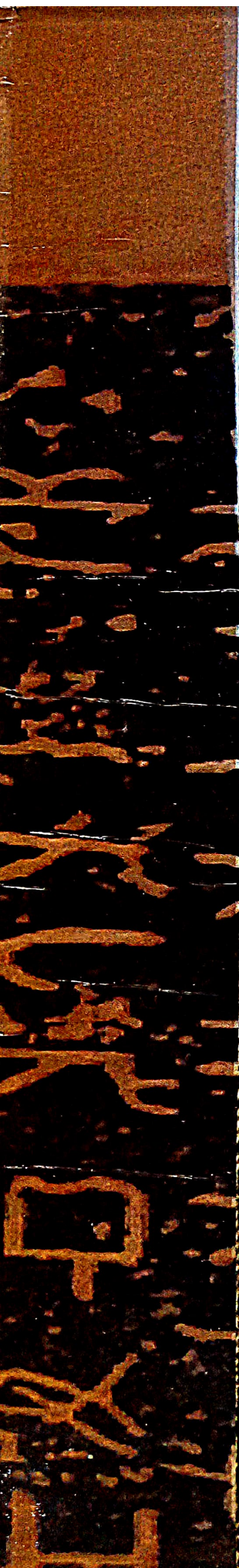


CLASSICAL BANGLA





CLASSICAL BANGLA



CLASSICAL BANGLA

An abridged version of the claim paper submitted by the Govt.
of West Bengal for the recognition of Classical status

Edited by

Amitava Das | Rajat Sanyal | Rajib Chakraborty



ILSR Press

Classical Bangla

Edited by Amitava Das, Rajat Sanyal, and Rajib Chakraborty

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CLASSICAL BANGLA

Document Prepared Under guidance of

Smt. Mamata Banerjee

Hon'ble Chief Minister, West Bengal

Under the active supervision of

Sri Bratya Basu

Chairperson, Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata

with cooperation and advice from

Sri Manish Jain, IAS

Principal Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal

Prof. Sugata Bose

Member of India's Parliament (2014-19),

**The Gardiner Chair of Oceanic History and Affairs,
Harvard University, USA.**

Director,

Netaji Research Bureau in Kolkata, India

Prof. Abhijit Binayak Bandyopadhyay

**Shared 2019 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences,
Ford Foundation International Professor of Economics at
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA**

Sri Shirsendu Mukhopadhyay

Eminent Bengali writer

Swami Shastrajnanananda

Secretary, Ramkrishna Mission Saradapith, Belur Math

Document Prepared by



Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR)
Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata

মমতা বানার্জী
মমতা বনার্জী
ممتا بنرجی

Mamata Banerjee



মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ
मुख्यमंत्री, पश्चिम बंगाल
وزیر اعلیٰ مغربی بنگال

CHIEF MINISTER, WEST BENGAL

FOREWORD

I am proud to dedicate to the Bengali people a historic research document prepared by our Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR) under the Higher Education Department of the Government of West Bengal, establishing the classical antiquity of the Bengali language to around 3rd – 4th century BCE. An expert team, consisting of in-house experts of ILSR as well as eminent scholars from the fields of archaeology, anthropo-history, linguistic and cultural studies, has prepared this comprehensive document spanning 4 volumes.

The first volume of this set looks into the evidences of earliest settlements in Bengal right from the pre-literate past (pre-5th to 3rd century BCE) in order to establish the ancestry of the speech-community called the Bengali. It further goes on to clearly establish the presence of a community called the Bengali at different geographical sites of the present-day Bengal from the pre-historic to the historic times through archaeological and historical evidences.

The second volume elaborates on the antiquity of Bengal as a geographical region and people therein, which is well evidenced from accounts of the places like Puṇḍravardhana, Vaṅga, Sumha, Tāmralipti/Tāmralipta, Gauḍa, Samātaṭa, Rāḍha, Gangaridai, as mentioned in various ancient Indian texts and in the accounts of the travelling foreigners, well as in various ancient inscriptions.

The third volume deals with the political history of sovereign Bengal from Śaśāṅka to Pāla-Sena era. This volume also contains discussion on the cultural heritage of Bengal, its traditions and legacy.

The fourth volume unequivocally proves the ancient origin and heritage of the Bengali language and discusses the development of the Bengali script. It is particularly interesting to remember that the earliest specimen of writing from the region is found in Mahasthangarh (in today's Bangladesh) dating back to the 3rd century BCE, featuring early Brāhmī characters. The fourth volume goes on to establish the ancestry of Bengali literature. Beginning with Cāryāpadā (the 7th century AD), Bengali literature progressed through various forms of oral and written medieval literature since.

Heritage and culture define a people. I thank the scholarly team of ILSR for their preparation of this research document. I also thank my colleague in the Cabinet and

Page 1 of 2

Nabanna, West Bengal Secretariat, Howrah - 711 102
West Bengal, India

Tel : + 91-33-22145555, + 91-33-22143101

Fax : + 91-33-22144046, + 91-33-22143528

মমতা বানার্জী
ममता बनार्जी
ممتا بنرجی

Mamata Banerjee



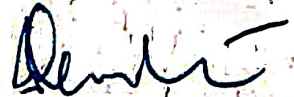
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मुख्यमंत्री, पश्चिम बंगाल
وزیر اعلیٰ مغربی بنگال

CHIEF MINISTER, WEST BENGAL

the Minister in Charge of Higher Education and School Education Departments, Shri Bratya Basu, for steering this effort as the chairman of ILSR.

The Government of India (vide their notification no. IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II dated 12.10.2004 and the Notification No. 2-16/2004-US (Akademies) dated 01.11.2004) had laid down four criteria for assigning classical status to any language of India. I am extremely happy to note that that the arguments offered in these 4 volumes clearly illustrate the key points in support of the claim for assigning classical status to Bangla as a member of the Neo Indo-Aryan Language family. The Government of West Bengal will present these Volumes before the proper forum to claim Bengali to be notified as a classical language. I am more than sure that Bangla/Bengali will be granted the classical status which is long overdue.

This is for the people of Bengal and the Bengali diaspora, all over the world.


(Mamata Banerjee)



Preface

Language involves the question of the Self and the question of Being and at the same time it hinges onto the question of the collective. To borrow the well-known German philosopher Martin Heidegger, Language is the “house of Being”, and therefore both the ontic and the epistemic soul of Bengal is encapsulated through the Bangla language, spoken by all Bengalis for more than thousand years. As a province and a culturally enriched region of India, Bengal is known for its literary and artistic excellence and all these heightened aesthetic and intellectual accomplishments have been animated through the ontological effervescence of the Bengali mind and the robust strength of the Bangla language for centuries. The sonorous mellifluousness, multitudinous depth and endearing cadence of the Bangla language evolved through centuries, having its originating anchorage in the fifth century. Any historiographic or genealogical study of the Bangla language and Bengali culture offers a fascinating cartography of linguistic and cultural infusion and heterodox flexibility, ensuring the emergence of a language that lends itself to be enriched through community interactions, quotidian singularity, geographic inflexions and through the everyday commerce of life and living. Bengal has been aptly described by scholars as the “Poyar chhonder desh” (a land of harmonious cadence and metrical symmetry), it has always blended differences, while retaining autonomy and subjective specificities. This simultaneous retention of harmony and cultural dissonance, unity amidst heterogeneity is the hallmark of both the Bengali mind and the Bengali language. This tradition of more than thousand years needs to be comprehensively archived and documented. In fact, the ancestry and historicity of the Bengali language and Bengali cultural striving requires greater projection and wider recognition. While Bengal’s thousand years’ old heritage of linguistic and cultural marvel is common knowledge, for posterity and for formal record keeping, the vigorous archive of the Bangla language and Bengali cultural artifacts needs immediate documentation for formal and official recognition and everlasting projection. Keeping that in mind, the Institute of Language Studies and Research, ILSR, Kolkata, a nodal center of research of the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, was entrusted with the task of preparing a detailed report on the classical ancestry of the Bangla language. Such an act of documentation is a herculean task, involving consistent research and meticulous documentation to affirm and to substantiate the classical anchorage of the Bangla language. Under the visionary tutelage of our Hon’ble Chief Minister Smt Mamata Banerjee, who dreams of reawakening of a resurgent Bengal, I am happy to present a monumental report which corroborates the already known fact about the classical status of the Bangla language. This report has been prepared by a scholarly team of experts of the Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata. I am also elated to note that this report is now being tabled to the right forum for the consignment of official recognition of the classical status of the Bangla language. This report has been prepared through archeological, historicist and scholarly substantiation which establishes quite firmly the classical nature of Bangla in terms of its ancestry, excellence and growth. Being the Chairperson of ILSR, I thank the ILSR scholarly team for their efforts and expertise and I am more than sure that their erudite exercise will bear fruits and Bangla will be granted the classical status which is long overdue.

Bratya Basu

Bratya Basu
Chairperson
Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata)



Acknowledgement

It is indeed a matter of great joy and accomplishment that the Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR, Kolkata) has prepared a comprehensive report to establish the classical status for the Bangla language. This is a monumental task and therefore, necessitated a collective effort and without the teamwork and constellations of various stakeholders and academic bodies this task could not have been possible.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and thanks to the Hon'ble Chief Minister Smt Mamata Banerjee who has a very special concern and care for the cultural heritage of Bengal and has inspired us to undertake this Herculean task. My sincerest thanks and gratitude also go to the Hon'ble Minister of School Education and Higher Education Departments and ex-officio Chairperson of ILSR, who has continuously guided us throughout the entire period of this project on the classical lineage of the Bangla language. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation and thanks to Sri Shibaji Ghosh, Secretary of ILSR and to the Finance Officer of ILSR for their unwavering support.

We are grateful to the Department of Higher Education and the Government of West Bengal for entrusting us with the task of carrying out this long research on establishing the classical ancestry of the Bangla language. ILSR is an institute of language and cultural studies research and our faculty members formed a team to conduct this research for more than two years and as this research involved cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary know-hows to ascertain the classical lineages of the Bangla language. Over a span of more than two years, our dedicated faculty members at ILSR, under the leadership of Dr. Amitava Das, who is the professor of School of Linguistic Studies (ILSR), formed a cohesive team to undertake this cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary research.

Special acknowledgment is extended to the diligent team members, including Dr. Rajat Sanyal (Faculty Member, Department of Archaeology, Calcutta University, Dr. Rajib Chakraborty (Linguist SNLTR, WB), Somnath Chakraborty (Scholar in Sanskrit & Epigraphy) and Sayak Basu (Research Scholar), for their tireless efforts in accomplishing this challenging task. The success of this endeavor also relied on the inputs from various other scholars, academic institutions, and different bodies.

We extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Anindya Shekhar Purakayastha (Professor, ILSR), Dr. Arjundeb Sensarma (Professor, Assam University), Dr. Lopamudra Maitra Bajpai, Dr. Pronobesh Ranjan Chakraborty (Assam University), for their insightful guidance and assistance throughout the project.

We especially thank Dr. Mursed Alam, (Assistant Professor of Gour College), Dr. Debarati Dutta, (Assistant Professor of Dhupguri Girls' College), and Nasima Islam, (Assistant Professor of Acharya Girish Chandra Bose College) for their assistance and support.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge here all the different stakeholders who helped us tremendously to complete our project. We are thankful to the Centre for Archaeological Studies and Training (CAST), Paschim Banga Bangla Academy, Paschimbanga Rajya Sangeet Academy, Paschimbanga Natya Academy, Rajya Charukala Parshad, Shishu Kishore Academy, Folk & Tribal Cultural Centre, Paschim Banga Jatra Academy, Minerva Natya Sanskriti Charcha Kendra, Manbhum Cultural Academy, Paschimbanga Baul Academy, Paschimbanga Dalit Sahitya Academy, Paschimbanga Hindi Academy, Rajbanshi Bhasha Academy, Kamtapuri Bhasha Academy, Paschimbanga Kazi Nazrul Islam Academy, Paschimbanga Kabita Academy, Paschimbanga Nritya Academy, West Bengal Tele Academy, Birsha Munda Academy, West Bengal Urdu Academy, Paschim Banga Santali Academy, West Bengal Heritage Commission.

We are also grateful to the Department of Archeology, University of Calcutta and Department of Pali, University of Calcutta for their consistent support through academic inputs and through the provision of academic resources.

The Saraswati Press and their team members have been of great support all through.

I am sure that with all our collective efforts and meticulous dexterity this report will be a grand success and Bangla will be granted its due recognition of being a classical language.

Dr. Swati Guha

Director

Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata

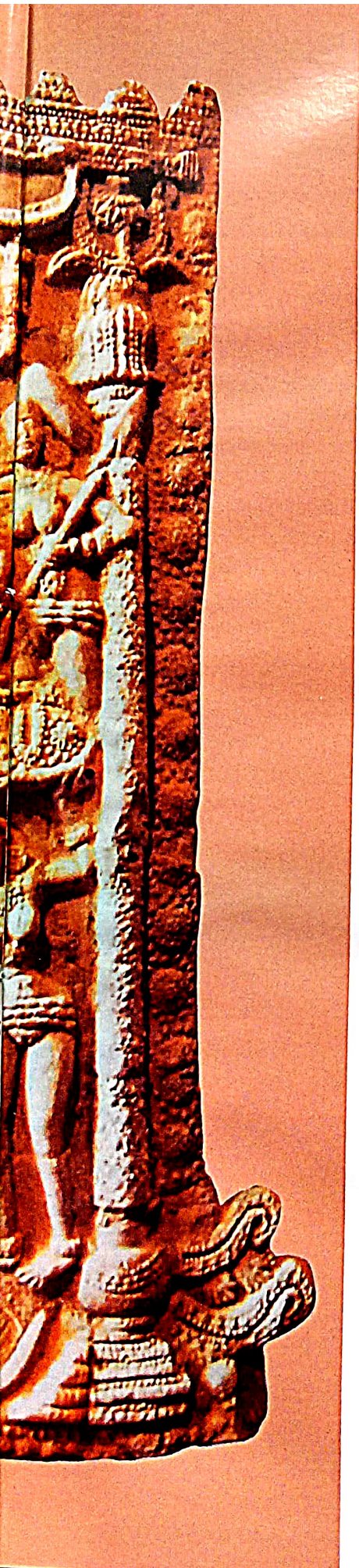
Editors' Note

In January 2024, the Government of West Bengal submitted a four-volume claim paper seeking recognition of Bangla as a classical language. Following this, on October 4, 2024, Bangla was granted Classical status by the Government of India, meeting the established criteria. Along with Bangla, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Marathi were also accorded this recognition. The current volume is an abridged and edited version of that claim paper, intended for a general audience.

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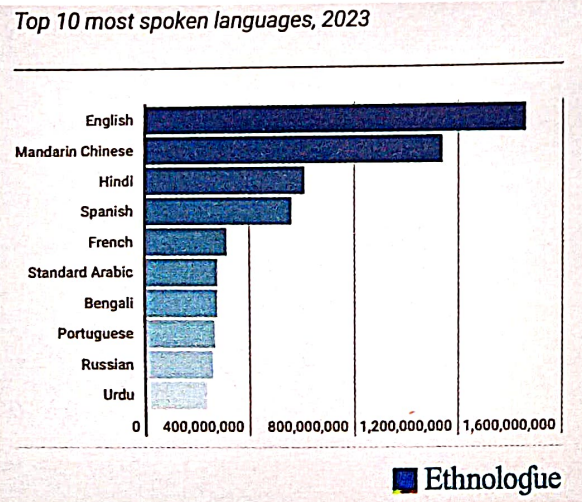
Chapter One

Introduction

Amitava Das

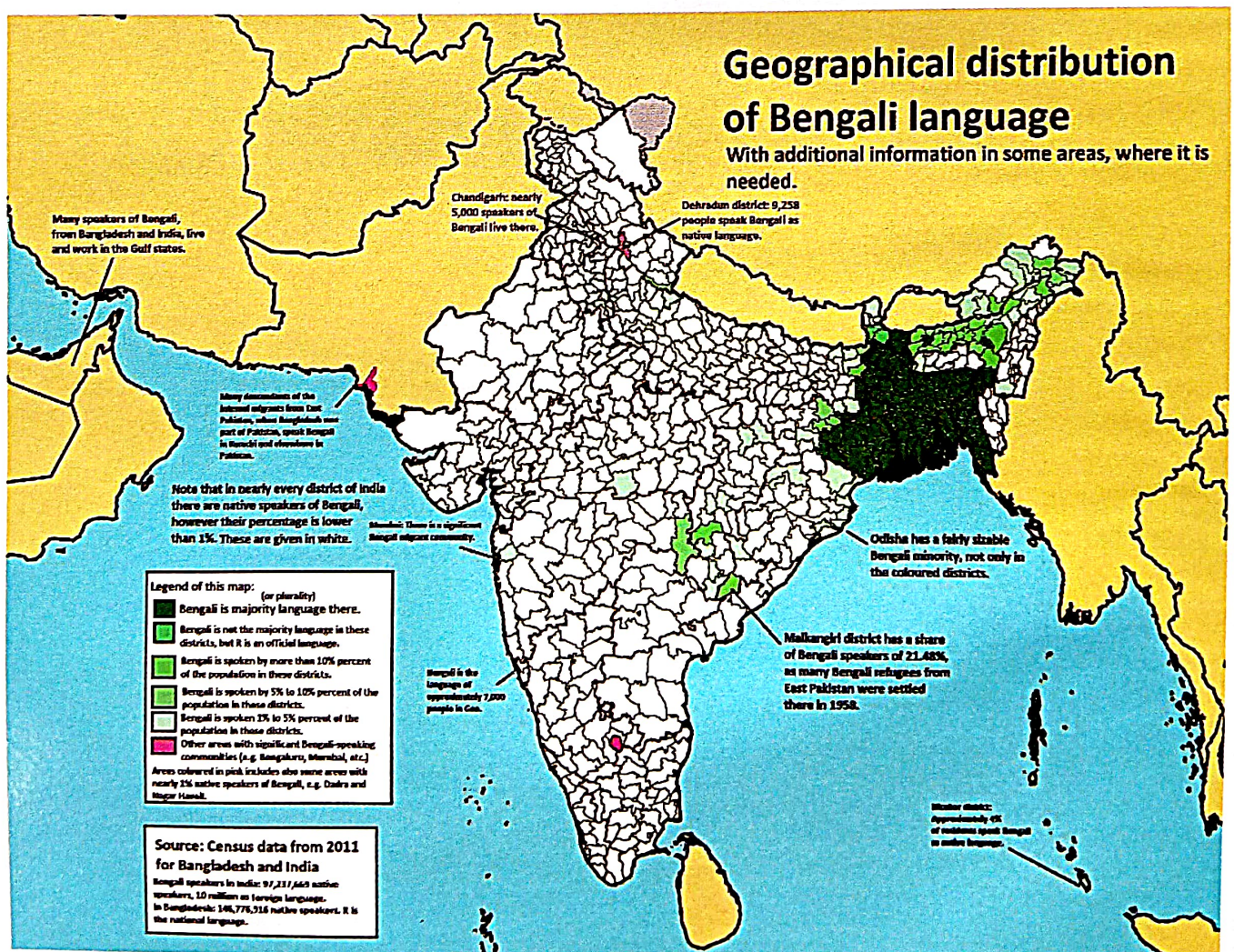
This claim-paper endeavors to establish the esteemed classical status of the Bengali language. According to the 2011 Census Report released by the

staggering 972,376,69 native speakers, stands as the second most widely spoken native language¹ in India among the 22 scheduled languages. Furthermore, as per the 2023 survey report in *Ethnologue*², it holds the seventh position among the most spoken languages globally, with an impressive 272,800,000 speakers³. Bengali, with its origins dating back to the pre-Aryan era, possesses its unique script and boasts a rich and thriving literary tradition. It is a matter of great pride for Bengal to be the first state in India as well as in Asia to secure a Nobel Prize, particularly in the field of literature, a feat attributed to Rabindranath Tagore. The Bengali language holds the status of being the national language of Bangladesh, as well as the official language of West



Government of India, Bengali, boasting a

Geographical Map
showing distribution of
Bengali Language



Bengal, Tripura, and the Barak Valley region of Assam. Additionally, it serves as the second official language of Jharkhand, is the most widely spoken language in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and is prevalent among significant populations in states such as Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Uttarakhand, and Delhi. It is spoken by the Bengali Diasporas in Europe, the United States, the Middle East and other countries. Bangla also has the rare privilege of starting off a national movement and giving birth to an independent country solely in its name i.e., Bangladesh. Beyond its demographic and historical importance, Bengali holds the distinction of meeting the four criteria stipulated by the Government of India for a language to attain classical status. These criteria are as follow:

- 1) High antiquity of its early texts/ recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years;
- 2) A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers;
- 3) The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community;
- 4) The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

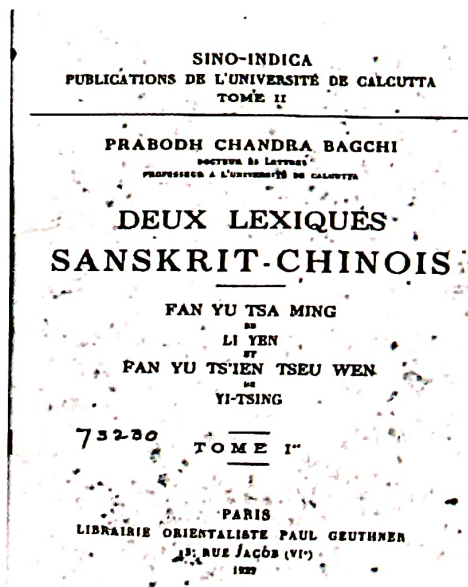
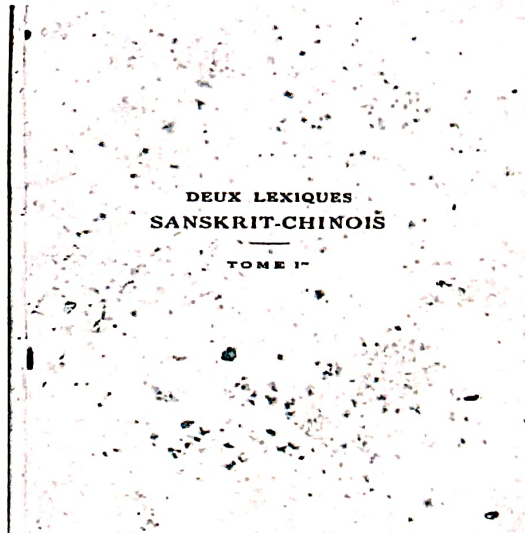
The Indian government has officially recognized six languages as having classical status: Tamil (2004), Sanskrit

(2005), Telugu and Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014). This brief introduction aims to outline the foundational arguments underpinning the assertion of Bengali's classical status. These points, however, will be explored in detail later in the paper.

Bengali stands as one of the oldest modern languages, extensively employed for communication both within India and abroad. Its evolution encompasses both oral and written traditions. The language's classical heritage is substantiated by a wealth of evidence derived from archaeological findings, inscriptions, mentions of the Bengali community in ancient Sanskrit and Pali texts, and an extensive body of literature in Bengali that predates at least the seventh century. Concrete proof of the written form of Bengali dating back to the 3rd-4th century BCE can be firmly established through the following pieces of evidence.

The oldest known Bengali text, *Caryāpada*, initially published in 1916 by Bangiya Sahitya Parishat under the editorship of Haraprasad Shastri, bearing the name *Hājār Bachorer Purāno Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāy Bauddhagāṇ O Dohā*, dates back to the 7th-8th century CE. Eminent scholars such as Sahidullah and Sylvain Lévi present evidence suggesting that some of the authors of *Caryāpada*, along with their associates, belonged to the 8th century. The text of *Caryāgītikoṣa*, commonly known as *Caryāpada*, was discovered in Nepal, as the palm leaf manuscripts used in Bengal were prone to destruction. The incorporation of a rhyme scheme (*pādākulaka*) in this text indicates that the language had already undergone

standardization, a process that likely spanned 300-400 years.



The Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary, known as *Deux Lexiques Sanskrit-Chinois*, was compiled in the 8th century CE and later edited by PC Bagchi into two volumes. This unique lexicon presents a list of words written in both Chinese bone and oracle characters (a form of pictograph) as well as the Siddham script. Interestingly, the dictionary unexpectedly includes over 50 Bengali words, despite being primarily a bilingual reference for Sanskrit and Chinese. This intriguing

fact underscores the widespread usage and importance of these Bengali words, even within a dictionary that primarily deals with different languages. It serves as a strong indication of the level to which the Bengali language had already been standardized. Consequently, it is reasonable to infer that Bengali emerged as a written language at least by the 1st-2nd century CE, given the time required for standardization.

Fan Yu Tsa Ming of Li Yen

1. maśo (<śmaśru)

腿 𣪠 𣪡	脣 𣪢 𣪣	指節 𣪤 𣪥	胃 𣪦 𣪧	手掌 𣪨 𣪩	股 𣪪 𣪫
腸 𣪬 𣪭	鬚 𣪮 𣪯	𣪰 𣪱 𣪲	𣪳 𣪴 𣪵	指 𣪶 𣪷	手 𣪸 𣪹

The age and lineage of the Bengali language are substantiated by a notable linguistic feature observed in line 12 of the 4th major rock edict of Maurya king Aśoka, dating back to the 3rd century BCE. In this instance, the spelling of the word "*dvādaśa*" (<in Sanskrit) is rendered as "*dbādaśa*," employing the labial or *vargīya ba* instead of the labio-

dental or *antaḥstha va*. Significantly, this substitution of 'b' for 'v' is a characteristic unique to both the Bengali script and its phonological system. From this, we can reasonably infer that the scribe responsible for the rock edict was Bengali, and that he inadvertently replaced 'v' with 'b'. This tangible proof unequivocally establishes that in the 3rd century BCE, Bengali was being written in the Brāhmī script, and the language's phonological patterns significantly influenced the script's writing system.

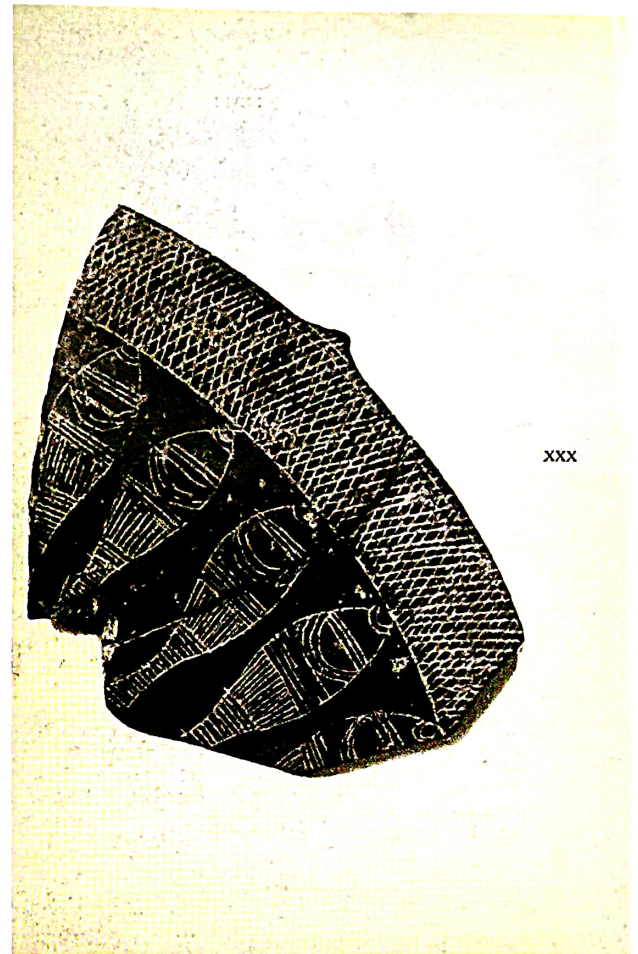
Right: The excavations at Pandurajar Dhibi, P.C.Dasgupta, A Bulletin of The Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal No. 2

The preceding conversation undeniably establishes the ancient origins of the Bengali language, meeting one of the criteria set forth by the Government of India for granting classical status. Hence, based on the aforementioned discourse, it can be asserted that Bengali has its roots dating back at least two millennia. Now, let's delve into the examination of the other two criteria for the designation of a language as classical – an extensive body of literature and a rich cultural heritage. But before we do so, let's allocate some space to discuss the Bengali community, who serve as both speakers of the language and contributors to its culture and literature.

The emergence and development of the Bengali language inherently imply the presence of a linguistic community known as the Bengali, who were the native speakers of this language. From archaeological, literary, and historical standpoints, there is abundant evidence affirming the existence of the Bengali people in the Bengal region. To facilitate discussion, we will now provide a concise summary of the supporting arguments.

Right: Human figures adorned with wings Chandraketurgarh 3rd Century BCE

Archaeological findings provide substantial evidence of early village settlements in western Bengal.



Noteworthy excavations like Pandurajar Dhibi in Burdwan and Chandraketurgarh have revealed



traces of an urbanized lifestyle imprinted on terracotta sculptures.

This artistic expression, along with the distinctive architectural style, indicates the attainment of a high level of urban culture by this community.

The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* refers to the Bengali people as *vayāṁsi*, a term connoting a clan associated with birds and



suggesting a perceived social distinction below that of the Aryan population. This indicates a historical isolation of the Bengali people from the broader Aryan Indian society. The sculptures discovered at Chandraketugarh further corroborate this notion, depicting human figures adorned with wings. References to the Bengali as a proto ethno-linguistic community are also abundant in Vedic literature.

Cultural historians and theorists argue that such isolation fosters a sense of distinctiveness, culminating in the formation of a separate identity. B. S. Guha additionally asserts that anthropological evidence supports the idea that the Bengali ethnic group exhibits discernible differences from the Aryan race. This

distinct identity is manifested through various cultural elements, both tangible and intangible, reflecting a unique consciousness among the Bengali people. Notably, this consciousness is closely intertwined with their indigenous, even pre-Aryan, language.

The term *saṁvaṅgīya*, discovered on a stone plaque inscription dating back to the 3rd century BCE, unearthed in Mahasthangarh, Bangladesh, serves as compelling evidence of a distinct and autonomous linguistic identity.

Left: Human figures adorned with wings
Chandraketugarh 3rd
Century BCE

The mention of places like Vaṅga, Samatāṭa, Puṇḍravardhana, Tāmralipta, and Gauḍa in a wide array of ancient texts including Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain literature, as well as epics, travelogues, Sanskrit and Prakrit works, such as the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, *Lalitavistara*, *Dīpavaṁśa*, *Mahāvaṁśa*, *Arthaśāstra*, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, *Mahābhāṣya*, *Raghuvamśa*, *Harṣacarita*, *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, Ptolemy's *Geography*, and Pliny's *Natural History*, along with travelogues of Xuanzang and Faxian, undeniably affirm Bengal's rich cultural heritage and its extensive connections with the wider world through trade and religious interactions. Moreover, extensive excavations, particularly at Buddhist sites like Jagjibanpur, Mogolmari, and Mahasthangarh, provide concrete evidence of a flourishing Buddhist cultural and religious history in Bengal. A notable example is that of Atiśa Dīpaṅkara, a renowned scholar who, upon invitation, journeyed from Bengal to Tibet, further emphasizing the region's intellectual and cultural prominence.

The Bengali people's proficiency in maritime trade and their reputation as prosperous businessmen find extensive support in both indigenous textual sources and the writings of figures like Ptolemy and Pliny. Bengal maintained a significant connection with the outside world through trade, particularly maritime trade, a legacy that persisted in popular imagination for an extended period. Early medieval Bengali literature, such as the *Maṅgalakāvyas*, which originated from the indigenous oral traditions of Bengal, repeatedly references this longstanding history of maritime trading. For instance, the tales of Cādsadāgara in *Manasāmaṅgala* and Dhanapati Sadāgara in *Caṇḍīmaṅgala* serve as accounts of the Bengali mercantile tradition, detailing the goods imported and exported. Commodities like jaggery, sugar, rice, spices, muslin, and fruits were exported from Bengal to foreign nations, while cowry shells, coral, conch shells, cloves, areca nuts, and horses were imported.

The *Śivāyana* by Rameshwar Bhattacharya, *Śūnyapurāṇa* by Ramai Pandit, and other *Maṅgalakāvyas* mention various types of paddy and rice. Significantly, references in the *Maṅgalakāvyas* indicate the presence of an exchange-based economy predating the introduction of cowry shells, attesting to the existence of a trading culture prior to the 6th century. It's important to note that these texts, written in the 14th century, incorporate episodes spanning different periods. For example, the tale of Cādsadāgara pertains to the 6th-7th century, while the story of Jālumālu belongs to the Turkish period, post-12th century.

The trade routes described in these texts align with earlier evidence found in Pali texts like *Mahāvamśa* and *Dīpavamśa*. Accounts by foreign authors also enumerate the goods exported from Bengal, with travelers marveling at the remarkable products originating from the region. In *Periplus* (1st century CE), the author mentions the Ganges and a market-town on its banks bearing the same name, which archaeological evidence unequivocally identifies as a port of Bengal. Ibn-Batuta (14th century) extensively described the diverse varieties of rice produced in Bengal, remarking that if one grain from each variety were placed in a pot, it would overflow. The Mughals, while describing Bengal as a difficult place to govern, also acknowledged its abundance in food resources.

In ancient times, Bengal was home to several significant janapadas, with cities dating back to Vedic periods. This region was incorporated into the territories of notable empires like the Mauryas and the Guptas. During Gupta rule in the fifth century, the political history of Bengal closely aligned with the provincial administrative division known as Puṇḍravarddhana bhukti, which encompassed northern Bengal.

Following the Gupta era, four rulers—Dvādaśāditya, Dharmāditya, Gopacandra, and Samācāradeva—held sway primarily in the Vāraka-maṇḍala viṣaya within the Vaṅga region, including the Kotalipara sector of present-day Gopalganj (formerly Faridpur) district in Bangladesh.

A parallel line of political development

emerged in southeastern Bengal and surrounding areas, particularly in the Comilla-Noakhali-Chattagram regions along the trans-Meghna corridor. This phase was characterized by the influence of three major lineages—the Rāta, the Khaḍga, and the Deva.

The final phase in the pre-Pāla era saw the accession of Śaśāṅka to the throne of Gauḍa, triggering a series of power conflicts that ultimately paved the way for the rise of the imperial Pāla lineage. The Pāla empire held sway over Bengal for an extensive period, reigning from the 8th to the 12th century CE.

Subsequent to the Pālas, other dynasties including the Candras, the Senas, and the Devas governed Bengal until the arrival of Islamic conquests.

From a linguistic perspective, Bengali differs significantly in phonology, morphology, and syntax from that of Indo-Aryan. Its phonological structure, both in terms of segmental and suprasegmental features, is distinctly unique. Bengal's rich cultural history is well-documented in numerous archaeological sites such as Chandraketugarh, Puṇḍravardhana, Mahasthangarh, Tāmralipta, Mangalkot, and Wari-Bateshwar. Anthropological data also indicates that Bengali people possess distinct characteristics setting them apart from the mainstream Aryans.

Given these linguistic and anthropological findings, it prompts a reconsideration of the hypothesis regarding the origin and development of the Bengali language. The classification of Bengali as a Neo Indo-Aryan language was a colonial construct,

but linguistically, it seems improbable that there was no existence of Bengali people or language prior to the Aryan influence or invasion in the 6th century CE. In typical linguistic contact scenarios, the dominant language or that of the ruling class usually contributes to the substrate language by sharing vocabulary and some morphological elements. Conversely, the substrate language, in this case Bengali, retains its fundamental syntactic structure, as well as its distinct morphological and phonological patterns.

The earliest specimen of writing from the region is found in Mahasthangarh, Bangladesh. This evidence consists of inscriptions on a stone plaque dating back to the 3rd century BCE, featuring early Brāhmī characters. As mentioned earlier, the 4th major rock edict of Maurya Aśoka, discovered in Girnar, Gujarat, provides concrete proof of the influence of spoken Bengali on the early Brāhmī writing system, seen in the substitution of 'ba' for 'va' in the spelling of 'dbāḍasa'.

Over time, the Brāhmī script gradually evolved, giving rise to a distinct script known as Siddhamātrkā, a term preferred by palaeographers. This script emerged around the late sixth century. In the northeastern part of India, a regional derivative of this script transformed into Proto-Bengali or Gauḍī, which remained in use from the 10th to the 14th century CE. This ultimately paved the way for the development of modern eastern scripts including Bengali, Assamese, and Odia. The detailed evolution of the Bengali alphabet is thoroughly discussed in the respective chapter.

Bengal's renown for its intellectual and cultural legacy is not a recent development; it has deep historical roots, having evolved over centuries. We can explore the different facets of Bengali culture in the following manner:

Traditional oral narratives like *bratakathā*, *bhāoyāiā*, *sārigān*, *jārigān*, along with performing arts such as *chou*, *alkap*, *jhumur*, *gambhira*, *Raibese dance*, *ranpa run*, represent distinctive elements of Bengali culture. These forms have developed over the years and were integral to the way of life for the people

The *Caryāpada*, Kṛittivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa*, Mālādhara's *Bengali Bhāgavata*, and Kāśirāmadasa's *Mahābhārata* all provide insights into the food culture, social rituals, and customs of the Bengali people. *Prākṛtapaiṅgala*, *Saduktikarṇāmrta*, and the *Narakhaṇḍa* of Maṅgalakāvyas vividly describe the rituals associated with birth, death, and marriage.

Archaeological excavations at sites like Chandraketugarh, Mahasthangarh, and Buddhist sites such as Mogolmari and Jagajjibanpur reveal evidence of an advanced culture in ancient Bengal. This is evident in the architectural design, city planning, and ornamental artifacts, attesting to the sophistication of ancient Bengal.

Bengal served as a hub for Buddhist culture, Tantra, and the Nath tradition. The birthplace of Śrī Caitanya is surrounded by a rich Vaiṣṇava tradition, giving rise to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. Additionally, Bengal has a vibrant Śaiva and Śakti tradition. The influence of Islam on architecture, language, and dietary practices has deep roots dating back to the medieval period.

Now, let's delve into the final criterion: literature written in Bengali. Bengali literature, as a cultural, aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual expression of the Bengali people, not only occupies a prominent place among the regional literatures of India but also makes a substantial contribution to the global literary landscape. The inception of literary expression in Bengali during the 7th-8th century CE, as exemplified by *Caryāpada*, indicates that the language underwent a significant period of development before attaining its current status as a literary medium in the 7th century.

The oral traditions—proverbs, riddles, folk stories—that form the bedrock of Bengali culture predated written literature and were passed down through generations. These facts substantiate the assertion that Bengali as a language has existed for at least two thousand years, thereby justifying the claim for its classical status.

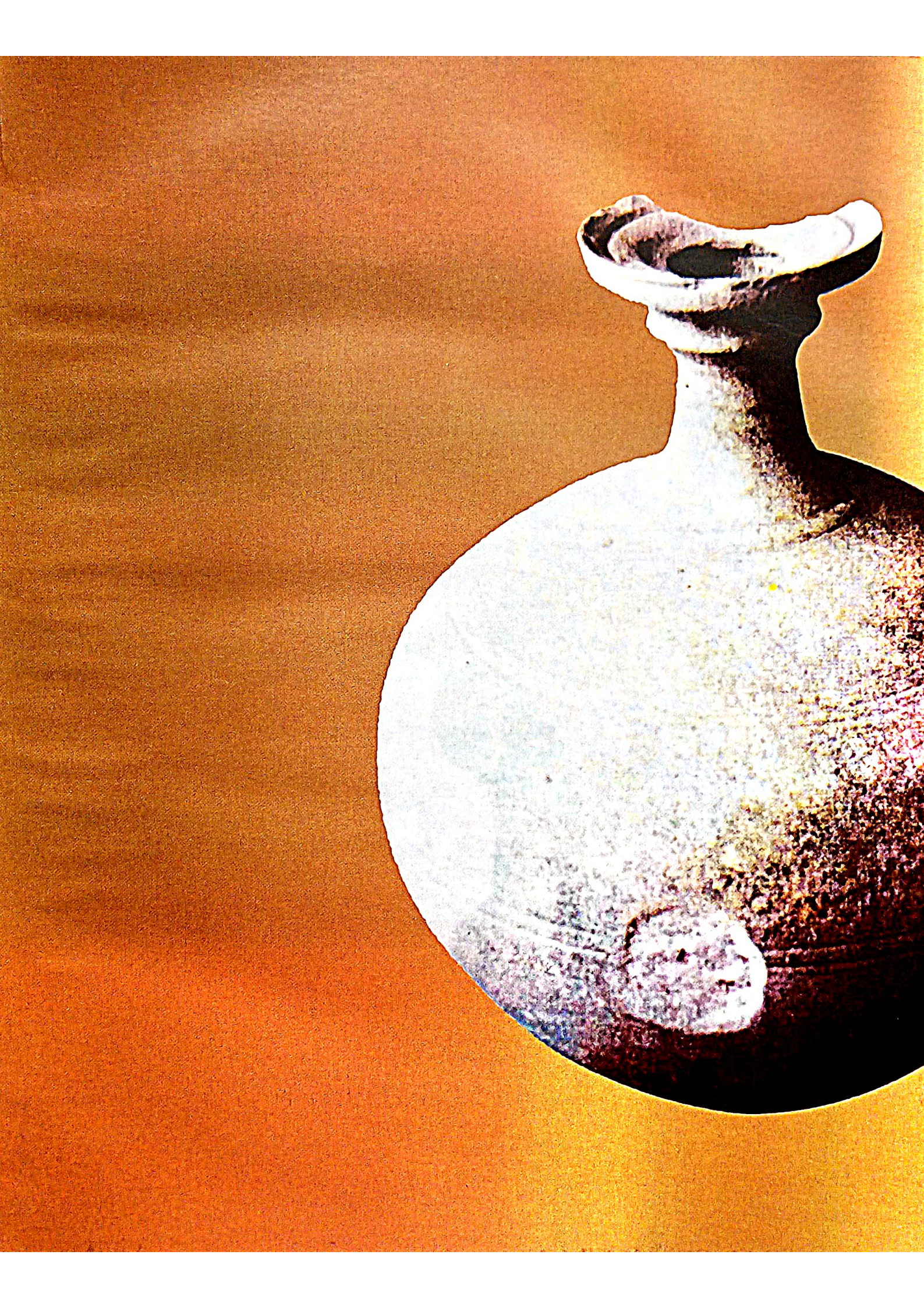
Beginning with *Caryāpada*, Bengali literature progressed through various forms including poetry, drama, ballads, novels, and short stories. It was enriched by translations from Sanskrit literature and classics from world literature. During the anti-colonial period, Bengali intellectuals and writers composed songs that became rallying cries for freedom fighters. Notably, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Vande Mātaram* was recited by these fighters for inspiration and courage. It's worth mentioning that the national anthem of India is written in Bengali.

Many of the modern literary genres were pioneered by Bengali writers, including the short story and the

novel. Modern Bengali poetry boasts such richness that it rightfully claims a distinguished place in world literature. Lastly, our national poet, Rabindranath Tagore, penned his immortal works in Bengali.

Notes

1. Language: India, States and Union Territories (Table C-16). *Census of India 2011*. New Delhi, p. 8.
2. First issued in 1951, *Ethnologue*, now published by SIL international, is the most comprehensive catalogue of languages that is published annually for documenting statistics and other information on the living languages of the world.
3. <https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/ethnologue200/>



Chapter Two

**Bengal Before History:
Material Milieu**

Somnath Chakraborty

This chapter looks into the evidences of earliest settlements in the region of West Bengal in order to establish the ancestry of the speech-community called the Bengali. The available archaeological and historical studies conclusively establish the settlement of people in the territory of what is known today as West Bengal. The presence of settled communities in the pre-literate times in West Bengal evidently speaks for the presence of a proto-Bengali language. Represented as the pre-literate past of Bengal (pre-5th to 3rd century BCE), this prehistory of West Bengal is evidenced through the cultural representation of stone tools and is spread across the archaeological time periods of Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic ages and thereafter. The chapter provides significant information about the Palaeoliths of Bengal, which primarily comes from the western parts of Bengal and is unique and distinct from the remaining parts of India. To explain this further, the chapter provides examples in the form of case studies of prehistoric settlements of West Bengal. These case studies include the Kushadwip (in Bankura district) chopper/chopping industry and information about the earliest dates of Microlithic industries of Late Pleistocene from Mahadebbera and Kana in Purulia district. Finally, the chapter highlights the Early Village Farming (EVF) settlements of Bengal, which also is unique and distinct in its representation. The chapter, therefore, first establishes the archaeological evidences of early settlements in West Bengal in the pre-literate period. After doing that, this chapter argues for the presence of a proto-Bengali language in the region.

Chapter is divided under the following sub-headings-

- Introduction: Understanding the preliterate past of Bengal (pre-5th-3rd century BCE) with reference to the rest of the nation
- Palaeolithic Bengal
- The beginning of Prehistoric excavations in West Bengal
- Some of the most significant Palaeolithic sites of West Bengal
 - Purulia
 - Bankura
 - ✓ Gopinathpur
 - ✓ The Kumari River Valley
 - ✓ The Kangsavati River Valley
 - ✓ The Bhairavbanki River Valley
 - ✓ The Dwarakeshwar Valley
 - Midnapore
 - Bardhaman
 - Birbhum
- Five sections of the Prehistory of Bengal
- Conclusion
 - The pre-literate past of Bengal
 - Understanding human life and its antiquity from the Palaeolithic findings of West Bengal

- Case studies of prehistoric settlements in West Bengal-
 1. A study of the Kushadwip chopper/chopping industry (Bankura, West Bengal) on the western part of Bengal as a representation of similar industries in the region
 2. Earliest dates and implications of Microlithic industries of Late Pleistocene from Mahadebbera and Kana, Purulia district, West Bengal.
- The Early Village Farming (EVF) stage of settlements in Bengal
- The spread of EVF sites in Bengal
- Conclusion- The various artifacts of EVF sites and what do they convey about the antiquity of the place and its inhabitants
- Bibliography

Introduction: Understanding the preliterate past of Bengal (pre-5th to 3rd century BCE) with reference to the rest of the nation

West Bengal covers an area of 87,616 square km and lies roughly between 21 degree 38' north and 27 degree 10' north and between 85 degree 50' east and 89 degree 50' east. According to the Geological Survey of India (1974) the three main geomorphological regions in the state are-

1. The extra Peninsular region of the north
2. The Peninsula mass of the southwest and
3. The Alluvial and Deltaic Plains of the south and east

The term 'preliterate' in the Indian sub-continent refers to a period in time prior to the emergence of script, i.e., pre-5th to 3rd century BCE phase. In archaeology, this is the prehistoric time or the stone ages, just before the protohistoric time.

"The antiquity of the stone ages is now stretched back to 1.5 million years ago, the date assigned to Acheulian tools in the site of Attirampakkam near Chennai. While hominid fossils

have not been reported from any dated prehistoric context prior to 10000 BP, it is now widely agreed upon, that the Homoerectus entered South Asia from West Asia around this time. In the sub-continent the Stone Age stretches till 7000-6000 BP when several groups of hunter-gatherer-fishers dominated the landscape with their light-duty blade implements, often hafted to wooden sticks or arrows to hunt small prey. These have been labelled as the Mesolithic cultures." (Chowdhury/Chakravarti, 2018 : 59) Cultural traditions overlap as is amply reflected in archaeological evidence. In the Vindhya and North central India many Mesolithic sites bear signatures of pastoralism seen in the faunal remains of domesticated animals and elements of early cultivation in the presence of saddle quern. Overall, this vast expanse of time is represented by diverse economies of hunter-gatherers-fishers — with some overlapping traditions in the later cultures — in a variety of ecological contexts. Archaeological evidence as reported from many excavated Palaeolithic sites show

a wide cultural repertoire of heavy-duty tools like hand axes, chopper-chopping tools, cleavers, knives forming part of Lower (including Acheulian) and Middle Palaeolithic cultures. Fossil remains and botanical samples recovered from many of these sites help to reconstruct the paleoenvironment. Systematic investigations undertaken in Hunsgi Valley, North Karnataka have revealed seasonal patterns in hunter-gatherer settlement centring on the availability of water sources. Rock paintings in Bhimbetka and other cave sites located in the Vindhyan-Kaimur range in central India offer an insight into the aesthetic world of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. The protohistoric period is constituted of diverse early farming and food producing cultures which are defined as the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic. "The beginnings of food production or the Neolithic period are best documented in the site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, Pakistan dated to 7000 BCE. Different settlements of this stage, with substantial diversity in material culture, extended till 2000 BCE in north central India, Ganga valley, eastern India and the peninsular region. The diversity is seen in a range of subsistence practices covering incipient agriculture, mixed farming, with a hunting economy existing on a parallel plane in a few cases explicated by the presence of microlithic tools. During this period one comes across, for the first time, rural settlements and small hamlets seen in excavated sequences of cultures, habitation floors, storage bins, a handmade pottery like cord impressed ware and a new ground and polished stone tool technology."

(Chowdhury/Chakravarti, 2018 : 60)

Many of these sites bore evidence of

multi-cultural occupation, continuing into the Chalcolithic period. These early farming populations lived in small units in a non-hierarchical social organisation which was yet to assume the complex structure of chiefdom. There is an overlap in chronology between the later phase of the Neolithic and the early phase of the Chalcolithic in the sub-continent, the earliest date now being assigned to Balathal in southern Rajasthan, i.e. 3700 BCE. These early farming and agricultural settlements show signs of internal differentiation, socio-cultural complexity and emergence of an elite population. Although the appearance of a copper technology is assumed to be a marker, many cultures grouped under this label showed no trace of copper. Having a wide spatial distribution spread over a vast geographical tract and in many cases preceded by antecedent Neolithic settlements these cultures continued to survive till early first millennium BCE.

The preliterate past of Bengal may be situated against this background and this can be further understood through exploring the history of prehistoric explorations in Bengal region as well as the work done till date and the artifacts studied and explored. All of these have provided an important focus which has led to understanding the antiquity or the age of habitation in the region.

➤ **Palaeolithic Bengal**

The south and south-western part of the state has a rolling plain and several hills which are an extension of the Chota Nagpur region geologically. Most of the Palaeolithic evidences are found in this part of the state. The districts that fall in

this region are (Chattopadhyay, 1992:27)-

1. Entire Purulia
2. Bankura with an exception of a small region in the northeast
3. The western part of Midnapore
4. Two small segments of Western Bardhaman and
5. A part of Western Birbhum

➤ **The beginning of Prehistoric excavations in West Bengal**

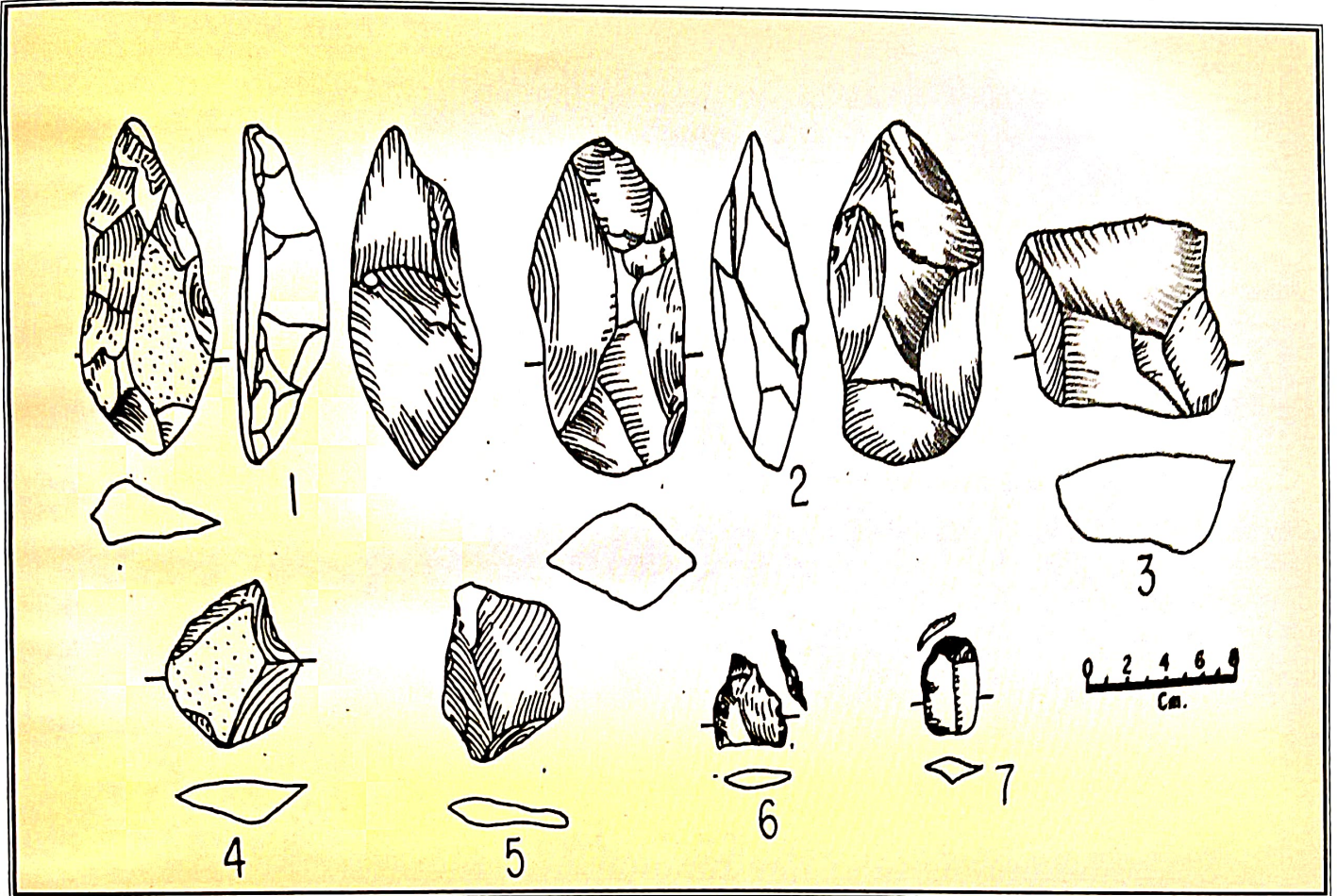
The news about the existence of Palaeolithic antiquity of Bengal was first confirmed by Valentine Ball, who reported a stone tool from the surface near the village of Kunkune, 11 miles southwest of Govindpur on the Grand Trunk Road. In the following years many more sites from West Bengal were reported and all of these laid the foundation for Prehistoric research of the state. But, it was not until a century later in 1959 that V.D Krishnaswamy of Archaeological Survey of India once again started prehistoric research in the state by surveying alluvial deposits along the rivers Kangsavati, Kumari and Jam in the districts of Bankura and Purulia. All of these regions belonged to lower and middle Palaeolithic periods. Finally, from 1961 onwards, a systematic study was started by the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University. A.K. Ghosh reported a collection of periods from the hilly complex of Belpahari and adjoining regions, but the context of

these occurrences was still not very clear. More surveys were conducted by the Department of Anthropology of Calcutta University and several Palaeolithic sites from the districts of Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia were reported. For the first time an attempt was made to analyse the stratigraphy, the typological features and the technological characteristics of the Palaeoliths of West Bengal. There was a feeling that this lateritic group is comparable to the second gravel known in the alluvial deposits from other parts of India. (Chattopadhyay, 1992:27)

At the same time the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, undertook extensive field investigations in this region under the guidance of P.C. Dasgupta for the entire Chota Nagpur fringe lying in the districts of Purulia, Bankura, Midnapur, Bardhaman and Birbhum. At this time the sites around Susunia Hill, Kankradara and some other areas from the districts of Bankura received special attention. The Directorate also recorded Middle Palaeolithic site at Deulpota in 24 Parganas (South). Some of the palaeolithic discoveries of the Directorate were made till 1986. In 1991 Ashok Datta reported a metrical analysis of Upper Palaeolithic blade tools from the mid Kasai Valley. Across 1981 and 82, The Archaeology and Museum Unit of the Department of History of University of Delhi undertook investigations in the prehistory of West Bengal. Professor R. K. Chattopadhyay undertook several explorations not only in West Bengal but also in the adjoining and other regions of Chota Nagpur in Bihar and Orissa. Between the year 1981, 82 and 83, the Department carried out extensive surveys around the districts of Bankura, Purulia,

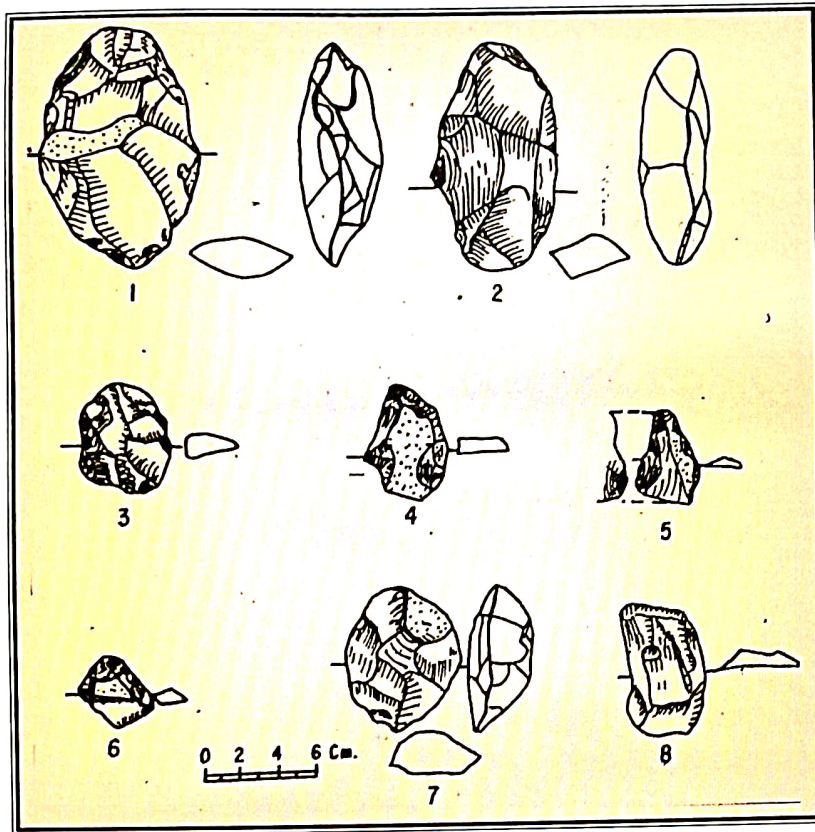
Midnapur and Bardhaman districts. All of these were published. Under the guidance of Professor Chattopadhyay more sites were discovered later on.

that West Bengal was an extension of Acheulian culture, which was dominated by "handaxes specially of ovate and lanceolate types. However, a substantial

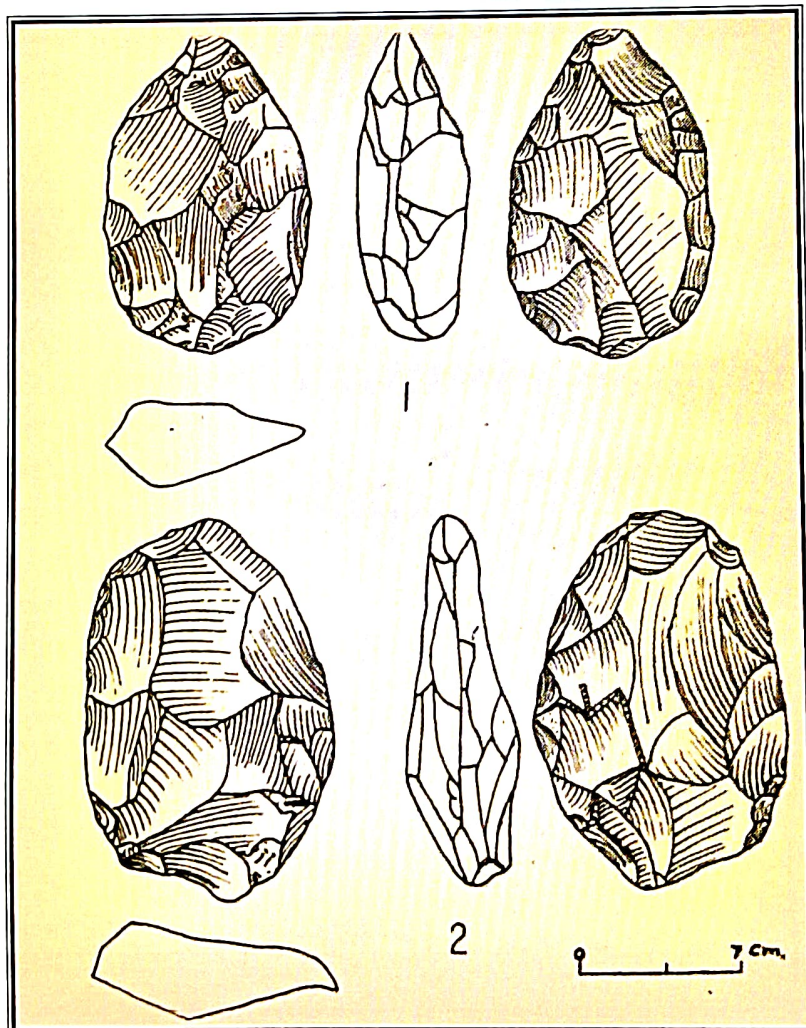


Over the years, many more researches were conducted, which carried forth the work. Some of the major contributions include, Chakladar (1941, 1942, 1952); V.D. Krishnaswamy (1959-60); A.K. Ghosh (1961, 1962, 1978, 1991); Dasgupta (1967, 1981); A. Datta (1979, 1982, 1985, 1988-89, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c); Ray (1991), Bhattacharyya (1987), amidst others. These ground-breaking works showed a distribution of Palaeolithic settlements in West Bengal between 86°-88° E and 21°-24° N (Ghosh, 1991). These excavations also revealed

percentage of the industrial components comprised of Chopper/Chopping tools. But despite this situation, Chopper/Chopping tools mostly made on round and elongated pebbles are included in the realm of Acheulian complex after the all-India pattern of development (Ghosh, 1985) without much justification." (Datta et al: 65).



Palaeolithic Tools from Bankura (after Chattopadhyay 1992)



➤ **Some of the most significant Palaeolithic sites of West Bengal**

PURULIA

This lies in the western border of West Bengal between 23° 42' N to 22 degrees 43' N latitude and 86 degrees 54' E to 85 degrees 49'E longitude. It covers an area of 6259 sq kms. The river Damodar flows along its northern fringe and Subarnarekha on its western border flows through Singbhum to Midnapore. Kasai or Kangsavati arises from north-west Purulia, flows in the south-eastern direction across the heart of the district.

Apart from these, there are many small streams which construct the entire prehistoric scene of the region. The western part is hilly and the eastern part is generally upland and this can be seen by general observation. In the southwest of the district there is the cluster of hills called the Ayodhya Hills which has the Subarnarekha River. The highest peak of the Ayodhya Hills is Ganga Buru (677 MTS). Most of the district is covered by archaean rocks consisting of gneiss and crystalline schists. The Palaeolithic occurrences reported from these hillslopes are from the rain-gulley or from the adjoining lateritic uplands (locally known as 'danga' or 'tanrh'). (Chattopadhyay, 1992:28).

Throughout 1959 and 1962 to 1984 and 85 different sites in Purulia district were explored by V.D. Krishnaswamy of the Archaeological Survey of India, A. K. Ghosh of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University and the Directorate of Archaeology of West

Bengal. All of these explorations provided enough evidence about the Palaeolithic artifacts of different types from Bhaurarhia on the river Jam, Muri, on the Subarnarekha bank of the stream Bondla near Jaychandi Hills, the cliff-sections of the hilly streams of Hanumata, Amruhasa, Naugasai and Likisaira and also from other sites like, Angora, Barahum, Jargo, Namsol, Sindurpur, Dabha, Matha forest, Kesargarh, Deultanrh, Belaghutu, Buripathari, Digardih, Ekro and Khudidih. (Chattopadhyay, 1992:28).

The archaeology Museum Unit of the Department of History, University of Delhi undertook a survey of this district and 20 prehistoric sites were identified from the whole of the district. Of these four sites are of the Palaeolithic period which were investigated by professor R K Chattopadhyay. These are (Chattopadhyay, 1992:28, 29).-

- Balarampur Dak Bungalow (BDB) (23 degrees 06'N Long and 86 degrees 12' E)
- Kana Pahar (KNP) (23 degrees 09'N Long and 86 degrees 13' E)
- Matha forest (MTF) (23 degrees 08'N Long and 86 degrees 09' E)
- Dabha (DBA) (23 degrees 06' N Long and 86 degrees 05' E)

BANKURA

This district lies between 22 degree 38' N to 23 degree 38' N latitude and 87 degree 46' E to 86 degree 36' E longitude. The area of the district is 6855.8 sq km. It has a hilly zone in the south and west and an undulating plane with lateritic gravel beds with rocky patches in the middle region and an alluvial stretch in

the north-east and eastern regions. There are two major hill ranges spreading over the north-western side of the district. These are Biharinath (447.8 mts) and Susunia (439.5 mts). Some of the major rivers of the region are- Damodar, Dwarakeshwar, Kangsavati and Silavati and besides these, there are various other smaller rivers and streams. All of these have played a very important role for the Palaeolithic population. The greater part of the district is covered by laterite and alluvium. The rock formations belonging to Archaean age occur in the western and southwestern parts of the district and just like Purulia it is an extension of the Chota Nagpur plateau. The discovery of the Paleolithic in the district was first made by Ball in the last century at Gopinathpur in the Southwest of Biharinath Hills. After that, V.D. Krishnaswamy discovered at the Kumari and Kansabati confluence the Paleolithic sites like Hatikheda, Buddih, Chiada, Ambikanagar, Pareshnath, Kajalkura and Uparsol. All of these places have yielded surface tools. According to the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta, "there are two different geographical settings in the region" (Chattopadhyay, 1992:30)

1. the region near Bankura town along the river Dwarakeshwar and
2. the river terraces of Kumari and Kangsavati near their confluence

Some of the important sites of the region include Majuria, Damodarpur, Bhutsahar, Uparsol, Krishnanagar, Numibad, Chikchika, Hatikheda, Buddih and Chiada. Since the mid-1960s the work of the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, has

concentrated upon the Susunia Hill region. There are other smaller sites too, like Kankdadara on the Kangsavati Valley and also, Bandarkanda, Dalambhi, Jadunga, Chandra, Damodarpur, Raktachura, Raktamura, Rangamatin, Rupahira, Sripur, Tentulchita, etc.

In the 1980s, the Department of History of the University of Delhi and their Archaeology and Museum Unit have extensively excavated the land across 30 Palaeolithic sites, yielding 86 artifacts. Some of the important ones are (Chattopadhyay, 1992:30-34)-

- **Gopinathpur** (Lat 23 degrees 25'15" N, Long 86 degrees 52' 50" E)
- **The Kumari River Valley**

A stretch of 10 kms of the river, yielded five localities, these are-

1. Hatikheda (HKD) (Lat 22 degrees 56' 50" N, Long 86 degrees 45' 15" E)
2. Buddih (Lat 22 degrees 56'55" N, Long 86 degrees 43'15" E)
3. Navachiada (Lat 22 degrees 56' 50" N, Long 86 degrees 44'45" E)
4. Ambikanagar (Lat 22 degrees 56' 25" N, Long 86 degrees 46'15"E)
5. Hapania (HPN) (Lat 22 degrees 56'15"N Long 86 degrees 44'E)

- **The Kangsavati River Valley**

The exploration was done mainly around the reservoir. This resulted in the discovery of four sites. They are-

1. Kankradara (KKD) (Lat 22 degree 55'50"N, Long 86 degree 53'15" E)
2. Damodarpur (DMP) (Lat 23 degree 12'20"N, Long 87 degree 02'15" E)
2. Kajalkura (KJK) (Lat 22 degree 59'15"N, Long 86 degree 44'15" E)
3. Manjura (MJR) (Lat 23 degree 12'15"N, Long 87 degree 02'20" E)
3. Gorabari (GRB) (Lat 22 degree 57'N, Long 86 degree 44'30" E)
4. Uparsol (UPS) (Lat 23 degree 12'15"N, Long 87 degree 02' E)
4. Pareshnath (Lat 22 degree 57'30"N, Long 86 degree 45' E)
5. Krishnanagar (Lat 23 degree 12'25" N, Long 87 degree 02' E)

• **The Bhairavbanki River Valley**

This is a small narrow river on the bank of which within an area of 7 km upstream and 10 km downstream from Elizabeth Anne Bura Kari was explored by professor Rakesh of the Kotha. The Palaeolithic sites on this river are

1. Katro I (KTR I) (Lat 22 degree 48'30"N, Long 86 degree 48'15" E)
2. Katro II (KTR II) (Lat 22 degree 48'45"N, Long 86 degree 48'15" E)
3. Dhankura (DHK) (Lat 22 degree 47'15"N, Long 86 degree 48' E)
4. Garpahar II (GRP II) (Lat 22 degree 45' N, Long 86 degree 49'30" E)
5. Fulkushma I (FKS I) (Lat 22 degree 42'55"N, Long 86 degree 51'30" E)
6. Chikchika (Lat 23 degree 12'55" N, Long 86 degree 57'30" E)
7. Nuniabad (Lat 23 degree 12'15" N, Long 86 degree 57' E)
8. Bhagabandh (BGD) (Lat 23 degree 12'25" N, Long 87 degree 01'55" E)
9. Guniada Hill (GND) (Lat 23 degree 09'15" N, Long 87 degree 45'20" E)
10. Susunia Hill (SSN) (Lat 23 degree 23' N- 23 degree 24'15" N, Long 87 degree 59' E- 87 degree 01'10" E)
11. Biharinath Hills (BHR) (Lat 23 degree 33'55" N- 23 degree 35' N, Long 86 degree 56' E- 86 degree 57'15"E)
12. Ranibandh Hill (RNB) (Lat 22 degree 51'45" N- 22 degree 52'45" N, Long 86 degree 46' E- 86 degree 46'55" E)

The Dwarakeshwar Valley

The sites recorded are-

1. Dhaldang (DHG) (Lat 23 degree 12'15"N, Long 87 degree 03'30" E)

MIDNAPUR

The district covers an area of 13619.15 sq kms and lies between 21 degree 36'N and 22 degrees 37'N latitude and

86 degrees 33'E to 88 degrees 11'E longitude. The north and north-west part of the district has a portion of the eastern part of the Chota Nagpur Plateau. "This section has hard undulating lateritic formation. Eastern part of the district has alluvial deposits and this part has the rivers Hooghly, Rupnarayan, Haldi, Keleghai, etc. In the upland of the district are the rivers Suvarnarekha, Kangsavati, Tarafeni, Silavati, Pitanau and other small streams. The northern and western region is covered by small rocky outcrops covered by Sal trees and other shrub vegetations. Archaean rocks are exposed in these hills. Palaeolithic occupations seem to have concentrated in these hilly land forms, especially in the region between Sildah-Belpahari and Laljal complex." (Chattopadhyay, 1992:35) A.K. Ghosh identified Palaeolithic sites at Astajuri, Bhedakui, Bamundih, Nynagarh, Labani, Simulpal, Gopalpur, Belpahari, Kantabone, Krishnapur, Muransole and Chakadoba. A.K. Ghosh also identified several caves and rock shelters. The Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal, explored the region along the rivers Suvarnarekha, Pitanau, Silavati and Kangsavati and had located Palaeolithic sites at- Rangamati, Ganganir Math (near Garbetha), Kalgaon, near the Midnapur town, Sapkotha hill, upland areas of Dhankamla, Tapovan, Chandabila and the upland regions of Ghorapincha, Begunadiha, Hatibari, Chitrakuti, Laljal, Dharampur and few other sites of the district. The Department of Museology, Calcutta University and M. Bhattacharya have explored the upland regions near Tarafeni reservoir Silda area. Asok Datta and D. Roy have explored Upper Palaeolithic sites at Kattara I

and Kattara II of the mid-Kasai valley in Jhargram subdivision of this district. The Archaeology and Museum Unit of University of Delhi had also undertaken explorations at (Chattopadhyay, 1992:35-37)-

1. Parihati (PRT) (Lat 22 degree 31' N, Long 86 degree 50' E)
2. Kashijhora (KSJ) (Lat 22 degree 44' N, Long 86 degree 43' E)
3. Mohanpur Satbati (MSB) (Lat 22 degree 35' N, Long 86 degree 48' E)
4. Tarafeni reservoir bridge (TRB) (Lat 22 degree 38' N, Long 86 degree 47' E)
5. Nakbindhi (NKB) (Lat 22 degree 10' N, Long 86 degree 59' E)
6. Patina (PTN) (Lat 22 degree 09' N, Long 87 degree E)
7. Jagannathpur (JNP) (Lat 22 degree 16' N, Long 87 degree 01' E)
8. Ganganir Math (GGM) (Lat 22 degree 53' N, Long 87 degree 21' E)



Prehistoric site
at Hatibari, West
Medinipur.
Courtesy: Arabinda
Singha Roy

BARDHAMAN

The district is situated between 22 degree 56' N to 23 degree 50' N latitude and 86 degree 84' E 88 degree 25'E longitude. The area of the district is 7034.44 sq k m. The region has two distinct types of land formation- the eastern side has alluvial plain, enclosed by the Ajay the Bhagirathi and the Damodar rivers and the west has a narrow strip of rocky, undulating land scattered with lateritic deposits. This is around 25 km wide between the Ajay and the Damodar rivers. The Raniganj coal-field is situated in this strip. "At places along the western extension one can see exposed Gondwana rocks. Palaeoliths have been found from the lateritic uplands. The place is also an

extension of the Chota Nagpur Plateau". (Chattopadhyay, 1992:37).

Palaeoliths were discovered by Ball in Raniganj in a coal-field area. "There are few other sites, which are seen to lie along the lateritic tract from around the town of Durgapur- and runs north-east to the south bank of Ajay river, near Bankathi-Egara mile through Kanksha forest. The other tract yielding few Palaeoliths along the foot-hills of Muktaichandi, near Rupnarayan, is surrounded by coal-fields. Excavations were done at Birbhanpur near Durgapur by BB Lal in 1966-67. The Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal had also conducted various fieldworks on the south bank of Ajay river. Later, The Archaeology and Museum Unit of the Department of History, University of

Delhi also conducted explorations. The sites thus explored are (Chattopadhyay, 1992:37-38)-

1. Egara mile (EGM) (Lat 23 degree 35' N, Long 87 degree 30'10" E)
2. Bamunara forest (BAF) (Lat 23 degree 31' N, Long 87 degree 23' E)
3. MuktaiChandiPahar (MCP) (Lat 23 degree 45' N, Long 86 degree 54' E)

BIRBHUM

The district lies between 23 degrees 33'N to 24 degrees 35'N latitude and 87 degrees 10'E to 88 degrees 2'E longitude. The district has an area of 4542.86 sq km. The entire area is one land mass broken by various successive undulations which are aligned along the north-west to south-east directions. In the western boundary are high ridges of compact laterite. These benches are separated by valleys of approximately 1 mile in width. In the south-east the uplands are less pronounced and the valleys become narrower and finally merge into the broad alluvial plains of the Gangetic delta. "In the north in the Rampurhat subdivision the regions are high and appear like small hills. Besides Gangetic alluvium the district also has Archaean gneiss and Gondwana rocks." (Chattopadhyay, 1992:38).

The Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal explored the regions of Jibdharpur and Nalhati, close to the Devi Lateshwari, Giridangal, Chinpai and Haligram. The region was also explored by the Department of Ancient Indian History Culture and Archaeology

of the Calcutta University, the Visva Bharati University and the Archaeology and Museum Unit of the Department of History of Delhi University. These have provided enough evidence of prehistoric antiquities around Shantiniketan.

Evidences of fossils were also gathered specifically from the laterite tract of Illambazar in the district (Chattopadhyay, 1992:39).

➤ Five sections of the Prehistory of Bengal (Chattopadhyay, 1992:39)

From the above paragraphs it can be surmised that the Palaeolithic context of West Bengal are mostly seen in the western section, which is an extension of the Chota Nagpur geomorphology and these can be seen in Purulia, Bankura, Midnapur, Bardhaman and Birbhum districts only. Some evidences are also found of Palaeoliths in the 24 Parganas found by the Directorate of Archaeology, but it is to be kept in mind that since the entire district is formed by recent alluvium and the site is very close to Diamond Harbour, there is no doubt that the material discovered is transported by the river action from further west. The five sections of the prehistory of Bengal can be described as-

- The Suvarnarekha section at Ghorapincha- the Directorate of Archaeology reports the following section in this place-
- Bottom-small gravels- nonimplementiferous
- Secondary laterite deposits containing Lower Palaeoliths

- Reddish and yellowish deposit-nonimplementiferous
- Yellowish loamy soil with patches of sand
- The Tarafeni reservoir section in Midnapur- this shows the following sequence-
 - Bed rock
 - Cemented gravel
 - Silt and clay
 - Gravel
 - Silt, clay and nodule
 - Loose gravels
 - Silt
- The Manjuranullah, near Bankura town- this contains the following sections-
 - Bed rock
 - Micacious clay
 - Whitish gravels
 - Detrital laterite with gravels
 - Reddish gravels in ferruginous matrix
 - Sandy alluvial soil deposition
- The Kumari section at Pareshnath
 - Bed rock
 - Gravels with concretionary matrix
 - Lateritic concretions
 - Alluvial soil depositions
- The Gandeshwari at Susunia section in Bankura- here, the sections include-
 - Bottom bedrock
 - Mottled clay
 - Pebble bed
 - Thin gravel bed (loose)
 - Silt bed compact
 - Sandy gravel

The pre-literate past of Bengal

A series of OSL2 (Optically Stimulated Luminescence) dates suggest a Late Pleistocene chronology of 42-25 thousand years ago (henceforth ka) of Bengal Palaeoliths. These are the first ever absolute dates from Bengal for this period "but this can even be pushed further with more research to a period of Middle Pleistocene (0.78-0.126 mya)". (Basak, 2018 : 61) We have only very few information about hunter-gatherer movements and land use from Ayodhya hill region and Tarafeni Valley in West Medinipur.

The proto-historic evidences are seen through excavated and explored sites which show early farming subsistence in Bengal, along with the Black and Red Ware. The term used instead of Chalcolithic here is Black and Red Ware settlements and these are mostly seen in the older alluvium, adjoining the western upland, with some sites concentrated in the new alluvium zone to its south/south-west. Although there are many excavations which have taken place across the last one century, further research will help to accumulate data for a holistic and continuous historical data. "...the preliterate past of West Bengal is rich in throwing light on past population groups engaged in hunting-gathering, fishing, incipient food production, settled agriculture and pastoralism." (Basak, 2018 : 77) However, more data needs to be collected to understand the entire chronology of the history and the pattern of human habitation. Though isolated BRW sites have been excavated, yet, their roles in the past settlement system

needs to be further studied and assessed. "Amongst researches underlining spatial distributional pattern of proto historic sites in West Bengal, the exploratory survey by Arun Nag remains the only notable exception." (Basak, 2018 : 77)

Understanding human life and its antiquity from the Palaeolithic findings of West Bengal

Prof. Chattopadhyay (1992:41) mentions that West Bengal rivers recorded only one type of gravel which was probably laid down during the Upper Pleistocene. "In course of the survey of the Palaeolithic sites in West Bengal, it appears that the lateritic uplands of dangas/tanrh played a very important role to trace the Prehistoric sequence as well as Prehistoric lithic assemblages of this region". (Chattopadhyay, 1992:41). Finally, a word about a rather thick mottled clay recorded in some sections, particularly at Egara mile. This represents a weathered micaceous schist which is different from the deposits in Narmada or other peninsular rivers."Apparently, when the first gravel or the gravels derived from the talus were being laid, probably the Palaeolithic population might already have arrived in West Bengal in the forested uplands only. Therefore, their cultural products have never been found incorporated in the earlier layers of the gravels.

During the latter phase, when they were already confident of their technology, having taken to missiles with efficiently prepared lanceheads on flakes, they might have included into the River Valley. Thus, in the river valleys we find no evidence of a stratigraphic separation of lower and

Middle Palaeoliths and both the faunal and the radiocarbon dates for this period, at least as far as they are recorded near Susunia hill in Bankura, would indicate that this gravel bed belongs to the Upper Pleistocene period, with the date going before 40000 BCE. However since we have argued that man did not penetrate in the riverbank until about the beginning of the Middle Palaeolithic stage, he seems to have preferred forested open-air sites or dangas- wherever fresh water and suitable raw materials for tool-making were available. Moreover the abundance of fossil wood and cut wood stumps on this danga areas indicate that they were heavily forested in the past, thus affording adequate hunting and gathering to the Prehistoric inhabitants of the region." (Chattopadhyay, 1992:42)

Characteristic of the Palaeolithic findings of West Bengal as explained by Prof. Chattopadhyay speaks of a large number of artifacts coming from hard, lateritic uplands, "previously covered with forest, sometimes having small quartzite hillocks. These areas, usually called dangas or tanrah- in local dialects, are mostly surrounded by tribal habitation. The Palaeolithic cultures disappeared in course of cultural evolution so did the hunter gatherers, who authored these cultures, but the memory of the Palaeolithic life patterns survives in the ritual hunting and rituals in areas represented in the Paleolithic map of West Bengal". (Chattopadhyay, 1992:48). This is a very important factor to note and also connects the Palaeoliths and the prehistory of Bengal to the present culture and the inhabitants.

➤ **Case Studies of Prehistoric Settlements of West Bengal**

1) Case study- The Kushadwip chopper/chopping industry (Bankura, West Bengal) on the western part of Bengal as a representative of similar industries of the region (after Datta, Mitra, Chakraborty, Duari, 1992: 65-76)

The Kushadwip chopper/chopping industry in Bankura district of Bengal provided vital evidence concerning the Acheulian industry of India. These evidences also suggest that the industry is "unique in nature, but also suggests the existence of a parallel development of chopper/chopping group in close interaction with the Acheulian culture. There are some unique features in the industry which alone qualify it as unparalleled in the Indian context. These are-

1. The industry shows a continued technological evolution and typological refinements throughout the entire stretch of Palaeolithic period.
2. It shows a complete evolution of the chopper/chopping complex.
3. The industry is completely free from handaxe/cleaver tools despite the fact that Susunia, a famous Acheulian site is within close proximity.
4. The industry demonstrates how the availability of raw materials dictated the entire process of Palaeolithic production system." (Datta et al. 1992:66).

Out of 18 sites, all provided excellent examples of chopper/chopping tools, along with a large number of flakes.

These chopper/chopping tools range in the sizes of 8.5 cms large to diminutive form of less than 1.5 cms along with large quantities of flakes. The tools made from unifacial and bifacial choppers are made on pebbles. Most of the important places amidst these 18 sites fall under Patrasayer or Sonamukhi Police Station (P.S.). These include-

- Amlakhul (87°27'E 23°10'30"N)
 - Got (87°26'E 23°10'30"N)
 - Badkhul (87°26'30"E 23°10'30"N)
 - GurquriPahari (87°25'30"E 23°10'30"N)
 - Bhairabdanga (87°27'E 23°10'30"N)
 - Kushadwip (87°26'E 23°9'N)
- Some important sites under Sonamukhi Police Station (P.S.) include-
- Chalkdhuakura (87°27'E 23°14'30" N)
 - Karasoli (87 26'E -23 °14'39"N)

To sum it up, it is important to understand the uniqueness of the Kushadwip industry, which, as mentioned earlier, is distinct from the rest of India and also imparts an understanding to the Palaeolithic culture of not only Bengal region, but also the rest of India. It is a pebble-tool industry, which mostly had chopper-chopping tools and considerable number of flakes. Quartz and quartzite are the only materials used in the Water-borne industry and pebbles were extensively used in the process of manufacturing of tools.

Typologically speaking, the Kushadwip industry is interesting, though it does not show any basic change as chopper-chopping tools along with flakes continued to occur till end of Pleistocene

period. However, what is interesting to note is the fact that the industry, as a whole, reveals a diminutive character through different stages. The reduction in sizes of chopper/chopping tools through different stages indicate a progressive change and three distinct techniques were identified, which are-

- Stone hammer techniques;
- Soft or cylinder hammer techniques
- Pressure flaking technique.

All of these techniques render the Kushadwip industry very distinct from rest of India. On the basis of technological changes and typological refinements, the Kushadwip industry has been divided into four developmental stages and all the stages have yielded chopper/chopping tools, besides choppers, flakes, cores, etc.

“Kushadwip industry as a whole, stands unique and quite unusual in the entire Indian sub-continent. It shows the pebble-tool tradition characterized by mainly chopper/chopping tools continued to

survive in complete isolation during the entire Pleistocene period. West Bengal is always considered as an area of advanced Acheulian culture where handaxes in all the major areas form more than 50% of the total industrial assemblage. Then how amidst a strong Acheulian influence,

the pebble tool tradition survived? This is completely a paradoxical situation. But nevertheless, the industry shows a complete evolution of forms and techniques. The most significant aspect of the industry is that the people had adopted techniques which are generally associated with the Acheulian and later cultures.” (Datta et al. 1992:71).

2) Case study- Earliest dates and implications of Microlithic industries of Late Pleistocene from Mahadebbera and Kana, Purulia district, West Bengal (after Basak, Srivastava, Dasgupta, Kumar and Rajaguru. 2014: 1167-1171)



(After Basak and Srivastava, 2017)

“Microlithic industries, a technology associated with modern humans, as defined by the production of microblades have been found in different parts of the Indian subcontinent with the earliest date

Microlithic site at Mahadebbera (After Basak and Srivastava, 2014)

being 48 ka. The present communication reports on recent archaeological excavations of these industries from a colluvial context located in the pediment surface of Precambrian hills in Purulia, West Bengal. These are dated to 34–25 ka by optically stimulated luminescence dating and are the earliest dates for microlithic industries in eastern India. To our knowledge such dating does not exist for any prehistoric site in Bengal. The context of the sites – hill-slope colluvium – is also unique and a rarity in the subcontinent. These findings add additional inputs to the knowledge of these industries, providing supporting evidence to their antiquity.” (Basak et al. 2014: 1167).

“Microlithic technologies have been invariably linked with modern human origins, dispersals and emergence of more complex human behaviour. The antiquity of these cultures in the Indian subcontinent has been pushed back to 48,000 BP in Metakheri, Madhya Pradesh and 35,000 BP in Jwalapuram, southern India, throwing new light on technological diversity, ecological situations and human behaviour in the Late Pleistocene.”

(Basak et al. 2014:1167). The discovery of microlithic industries of 42 ± 4 ka from Kana and 34 ± 3 – 25 ± 3 ka from Mahadebbera occupies a special place, located on the colluvium covered pediment surface in the foothills region of the Ayodhya hills in Purulia district of West Bengal, which is composed of



Microlithic site at Mahadebbera (After Basak and Srivastava, 2014)

Precambrian rocks.

“The colluvium unit containing microblade artefacts at both the sites belongs to the Manbazar Formation of Kumari basin. The dates derived by



optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dating technique provide the earliest chronology of these industries in Bengal and eastern India and give supportive evidence to the antiquity of microlithic industries in the Indian subcontinent. Microlithic industries of Tarafeni Valley, West Medinipur district, WB were relatively dated to Late/Terminal Pleistocene with significant information available on the palaeoenvironment. Therefore, the present study substantiates these findings in Bengal. In eastern India only a single date of Late Pleistocene is available so far from Tripura for artefacts of late Middle Palaeolithic/Upper Palaeolithic period occurring in Late Pleistocene deposits (N. R. Ramesh, unpublished). In the Indian subcontinent, most Upper Paleolithic/microlithic sites are reported from alluvial context, sand dunes or rock shelters.

There are very few late Pleistocene sites in a dated colluvial context in the Indian subcontinent. Patne located in the pediment surface of Ajanta hills, Jalgaon district, Maharashtra is one of the few exceptions." (Basak et al. 2014:1167-1168).

- **Mahadebbera**
(23°11'38.77"N;
86°11'53.3"E; 304 m
amsl)-

This is located within 500 m northwest of Ghatbera village, on the left bank of a low-order stream in the catchment area of Kumari river. It was discovered as part of intensive exploration in the region

since 1998– 1999. A total of 111 artefacts were obtained from the excavated trench at Mahadebbera and 790 artefacts from the exposed context of the non-excavated area of the site by laying out grids and by dog-leash sampling method using Brunton compass and tape. It is clear, from a close study of all these artifacts that cores were reduced primarily for the production of microblades and backed artefacts.

- **Kana** (23°07'42.7"N;
86°12'47.5"E; 288 m amsl)-

This is located about 500 m northwest of Kana village at the foothills of an inselberg. The site was discovered earlier and was revisited by Basak (the first author of this paper) in 2001 and in 2012–13 when a section was cleared to understand the

Backed artefacts from
Mahadebbera (After
Basak and Srivastava, 2014)

stratigraphy. The assemblage at Kana shows noteworthy differences from Mahadebbera in the presence of a small percentage of primary reduction seen in raw material nodules, large flakes.

Finally, it can be understood that “human activity in the Late Pleistocene took place over colluvial pediment surface at both the sites. At Mahadebbera, the site is drained by ephemeral low-order streams in the catchment of the Kumari river. About 10 m below the site in the river section, bedrock is exposed in the stream bed unconformably overlain by the colluvial material, which in turn is overlain by a thin fluvial gravel bed. Coarse sandy matrix within the gravel framework yielded very young OSL date of 2k in comparison to the Late Pleistocene date of the underlying colluvium. This indicates that such ephemeral streams were non-existent during the recorded human activity near the site. On the other hand, at Kana no major drainage traverses the pediment surface; instead, there are a good number of shallow depressions surrounded by 2–3 m cliffs representing conspicuous badland terrain. These depressions are floored by granite overlain by residuals of weathered bedrock, colluvial debris and also gruss material that contains the artefacts. Some of the relict depressions are modern-day ponds. To sum up, the importance of the study lies in the (i) dating of microblade industries of Late Pleistocene in eastern India; (ii) location of the sites in a hillslope colluvial context, which is rare in the Indian subcontinent and (iii) multi-disciplinary nature of the study.” (Basak et al. 1170-1171)

➤ The Early Village Farming (EVF) stage of settlements

The formative stage of the Early Village Farming or EVF settlements in Eastern India is characterised by the presence of a pottery type, which is long-lasting. This is the Black-and-red Ware or BRW. Various sites have given the evidences of BRW, including Chirand (north Bihar) and Pandurajar Dhibi (West Bengal). Excavations were conducted in the early 1960s. These excavations created special focus on archaeological research of Eastern India. (Chakraborti 2001, 2006, Chattopadhyay and Sanyal 2006: 1386). These researches also show a break in the two sequences- the pre-ceramic hunter-gatherer/Mesolithic- 'Mesolithic Survivor' stage and the beginning of the historical period in 6th century BCE. An important branch is the study of agro-pastoral economy of the Protohistoric periods- which is around the middle of the 2nd and the 1st millennia BCE).

In the present undertaking, many of the geographical-geological niches of the state of West Bengal have to be seen, “in the context of early settlement networks, as forming extensions of the Chota Nagpur plateau and the adjoining plains of South Bihar. Thus, “the broader geo-hydrographic configurations of West Bengal, already delineated earlier, have to be viewed in terms of their relationship with the growth of human settlements within their geographical orbits.” (Chattopadhyay et al. 2006-07: 68). A large number of EVF sites, bearing evidences of BRW have been excavated.

➤ The spread of EVF sites-

The sites can be seen, as mentioned by Chattopadhyay and his team (2006-07), distributed through a wide area from Bangarh (25°16'/N, Dakshin Dinajpur) in the north and Mogalmari (21°57'N, West Medinipur) in the south. As Bangarh is located in a somewhat secluded position and has yielded only one BRW shred, Kherur (24°22'/N, Murshidabad) has been considered as the northernmost site. The easternmost site is Bangarh (88°32'/E, Dakshin Dinajpur) while the westernmost site is Ambikanagar (86°46'/E, Bankura). Leaving Bangarh for the reasons cited above, the easternmost site is Charul (88°15'/E, Bardhaman). If an intensive and thorough exploration confirms the contexts of EVF settlements at Deultaur/Deultarn (86°30'/E, Purulia), the western extension of the BRW bearing sites will definitely be enhanced. Presently, one has to take the spatial limits of BRW bearing sites within the state as ranging between the latitudes of 24°22'/N and 21°57'/N and longitudes of 86°46'/E and 88°15'/E that is within a latitudinal extent of 2°25' and a longitudinal extent of 1°27' (Karchaudhuri 2007).

The EVF sites explored by various authorities which are also BRW bearing sites and were explored on the valley of Damodar and its tributaries in the Bardhaman district are (after Chattopadhyay et al. 2006-07: 69-81)-

-**Punchra**(23°42'/15//N/87°01'/50//E) is a large old village near Asansol, already well-known for its enormous sculptural resources.

-**Sheharsole**(23°36'/15//N/87°06'/E) is also a large sculptural site. During exploration, one of the oldest settlement areas yielded BRW associated habitation debris. Hijalgarh, Chakdol, Badalpur, Gram-Andal and Ukhra are the neighbouring localities having habitation remains, although their context has to be determined with further fieldwork in the area.

-**Birbhanpur**(23°28'/45//N/87°24'/E)

-The old locality of **Pairagpur** (23°26'/50//N/87°30'/E) may be identified as an extension of the present Panagarhbazaar along the Grant Trunk Road.

-The village of **Rakshitpur** (23°33'/30//N/87°26'/E) on the valley of river Kunur in the district of Bardhaman is located about 1km southeast of Malandighi.

-The site of **Saldanga** (23°28'/30//N/87°20'/E) on the Damodar in the district of Bardhaman is located a few km downstream of the Damodar from Bharatpur.

-**Simisimi**(23°16'/48//N/87°35'/36//E) is located just on the right bank of Damodar and a number of neighbouring villages including **MallaSarul** (23°17'/35//N/87°36'/20//E), **Kaitara**, 23°17'/10//N/87°38'/24//E), **Bikrampur** (87°36'/N/23°16'/07//E) and **Kashpur** (87°35'/N/23°17'/E) have yielded BRW assemblages from primary contexts.

Among the notable sites recently

discovered in the district of Bankura in the valleys of Sali and Darakeswar rivers, the following deserve detailed note:

- Antra** (23°13'N/87°34'30"/E) is located about 3 km northeast of Patrasayar in the valley of river Sali.
- Balarampur** (23°13'30"N / 87°33'30"E) is situated about 2.5 km northeast of Patrasayar.
- The village of **Dayalpur** (23°13'N / 87°34'30"E) is located just by the northern side of Antra.
- Konra** (23°23'N / 87°07'E) is located on the foot of the hill of the same name about 1 km south of the village named Amarkan.
- Kantor** (23°08'30"N / 87°30'E) is located on the left bank of river Dwarakeswar, about 3 km south of Jamkuri.
- The site of **Kholamdanga** (23°08'30" N / 87°26'45"E) is located on the right hand side of Patrasayar-Bishnupur Road, about 1 km southwest of Kangrasol.
- Rameswarkura** (23°07'N/ 87°25'30"E) is situated 4 km south of Kushadwip on the left bank of Dwarakeswar adjacent to **Naricha**.
- The site of **Pandua** (23°08'N / 87°26'E) is situated about 3 km southwest of Kangrasol on the two sides of Balsi-Vishnupur Road.
- Sahpur** (23°10'30"N/87°24'45"E) is located 3 km northwest of Kushadwip in a forested environment.

There are as many as twenty excavated sites bearing traces of BRW occupation in varying geographical niches. A brief account of the database so far published is presented in the following(after

Chattopadhyay et al. 2006-07: 69-81)

- Kotasur**(23°58'N/87°45'E) is located on the left bank of Mayurakshi in the Birbhum district about 5 km northeast of Sainthia Railway Station.
- Hat Ikra** (23°49'25"/N/87°35'42"/E) is situated on the left bank of river Bakreswar which flows about 1km west of the present village.
- Haraipur**(23° 52'N/87°35'E) is a small village by the side of the Bolpur-Siuri Road.
- Mahisdal**(23°42'N/87°42'E) is situated in the southern part of district Birbhum on the left bank of river Kopai.
- Bahiri** (23°39'N / 87°40'E)- this is situated in the flood plain of river Ajay on the Bolpur-Palitpur road about 7 km east of Bolpur in the district of Birbhum.
- Nanur** (23°42'N/87°57'E) is located in the south eastern part of the district of Birbhum about 20 km northeast of Bolpur on the Bolpur Kirnagar road.
- Pandurajardhibi** (23°25'N/87°39'E) is situated in the village of Panduk, Police Station Ausgram in the district of Bardhaman on the right bank of river Ajay.
- Mangalkote** (23°31'N/87°56'E) is situated in the district of Bardhaman on the eastern bank of Kunur, near its confluence with Ajay.
- Baneswardanga** (23°24'N/87°59'E) is situated 29 km northeast of Bardhaman in the village of Barabelun within the

Bhatar Police Station.

- **Bharatpur** (23°24'/N/87°27'/E) is a small village in the district of Bardhaman on the left bank of Damodar.

- The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Govt. of West Bengal has conducted trial diggings at **Charul** (23°30'/N/88°15'/E) in the year 2003. The site is located on the Brahmani in the Katwa subdivision. Sporadic occurrence of BRW has been reported at a depth between 1.20 and 2.00m.

- **Pakhanna**

(23°24'/N/87°22'/E) is situated on the southern bank of Damodar, in the Barjora Police Station of the district of Bankura.

- **Dihar** (23°07'/N/87°21'/E) is situated on the left bank of river Dwarakeswar in Bankura district, Police Station Bishnupur, about 6 km north of Bishnupur town.

- **Tulsipur** (22°56'N/86°46'/E) is located on the right bank of river Kangsavati below its confluence with the Kumari near Kangsavati reservoir.

- **Sijua** (23°37'/N/88°02'/E) is a small village located on the left bank of Kasai or Kangsabati near Bamal, the famous 'Neolithic' site of district.

- **Moghamari** (21°57'/N/87°16'/E) is located in the district of Paschim [West], in the Police Station of Dantan.

- **Tamluk** (22°22'/N/87°55'/E) is situated on the right bank of river Rupnarayan in Purba [East] district.

- **Natsal**

(22°11'/N/88°02'/E)

is located on the right bank of Rupnarayan, 2.5km east of Mahishadal of Purba [East] district.

Most of the settlements in the western segment of the BRW cultural zone of Eastern India, which comprises of the Chota Nagpur fringe areas, upto the Ajay-Damodar interfluvies, were located at high 'terraces', which in the local dialect is referred to as danga and overlooks rivers. Some of the places which show this prominently is Pandukerdanga (Pandurajardhibi), Sal danga (Bharatpur), Chandra Hazrar danga and Mulukerdanga (Bahiri), Baneshwadanga (Barebelun), Bhairabdanga (Pakhanna) and Sarkaridanga (Mangalkote). Many of the settlements were also located close to river cliff like Pakhanna, Bharatpur and Mangalkote.

It may be assumed that this was a choice to prevent the habitation from occasional fluvial activities which is a character of the whole of Bengal over the centuries. On the other hand this choice also provided scope to explore land for pastures and low lying agricultural fields along the flood plains. There was also great access to wild and aquatic species through extensive hunting and fishing respectively, according to the evidence from the material assemblages and location as is evident from sites like Tulsipur and Kumardanga. This also reflects the interrelationship between the ecological set-up of the space and the strategies of substance and resource mobilisation by the EVF communities of the region.

Structural remains from most of the EVF sites of Eastern India have been

mostly found primarily because of variegated geological-hydrographic factors from highly disturbed contexts and in a very poor state of preservation. Evidences from important sites like- Pandurajardhibi, Mahisdal, Pakhanna, Bharatpur and Mangalkote clearly exhibit a steady development of sedentary settlement in the Ajay-Damodar and the Bhagirathi plains. The following categories of structural remains at the earliest settlement of Eastern India can be identified-

- Mud/rammed floor
- Reed impressed clay chunks
- Occasional occurrences of hearths/ovens and furnaces
- Larger strips of floor areas, possibly indicating lanes/passages/open spaces
- pit-silos
- Refuse pits
- structural or storage pits
- posthole
- industrial/manufacturing complexes or workshops (potter and metal workers)
- reed impressed clay reflecting extensive use of wattle-and-daub structures



Terracotta ring-well cutting across Chalcolithic level at Mangalkot
(Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta)

Conclusion- The various artefacts of EVF sites and what do they convey about the antiquity of the place and its inhabitants

Among pottery, BRW remains prominent throughout. Besides this, three main pottery types remain prominent in West Bengal-

- BSW
- Red Ware
- Grey Ware

Bone and antler implements of various wild and domesticated animals have been found extensively in all the sites-like points, arrowheads, dagger, awls, scrappers, bone pins, antlers, borers, combs, flutes, shell pendants and many types of beads. A large number of worked-bone artifacts can also be seen associated with leatherwork, fishing and hair-dressing.

"Stone objects form an important part of eastern India. Microliths have been recovered from almost all sites. The stone tools discovered at these EVF sites may be divided into- milling tools at an early stage and their use in agrarian activities at a later date, whereas polished stone tools in general definitely served purposes involving woodwork." (Chattopadhyay et al, 2006-07: 83). Metal has been an important focus of EVF sites in eastern India- consisting of iron and copper.

The evidence of domesticated species found in the sites are- humped cattle, buffalo, pig, sheep and goat. The

wild species, according to evidence from Mangalkote, Bharatpur and Pandurajardhibi include deer, swamp deer, spotted deer, barking deer, fowl, nilgai, wild cattle, wild rat, wild dog, etc. The aquatic examples from these sites include mostly various fishes and turtles. A large number of terracotta artifacts have been found from most EVF sites of Bengal, including Pandurajardhibi, Mahisdal, Bharatpur, Mangalkote, Bahiri, Baneswardanga, Pakhanna and Dihar. Finally, the "occurrence of metal- both copper and iron, has often been taken as one of the diagnostic indicators of the development" (Chattopadhyay et al, 2006-07:84-85) of the EVF processes. The discovery of the South Bihar Plains emphasise the fact that the Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and its eastern fringe areas in Jharkhand and West Bengal slowly adopted the knowledge of sedentism and the usage of ceramics and farming and this helped them to supplement their surrounding natural resources. They were dependent on water resources, so the clusters of habitation are mostly found in flood plain areas of Ajay Damodar and Darakeswar river regions. This habitation extends from middle Ganga Valley through the South Bihar Plains to the Lower Gangetic Bengal. So, "large scale agro-pastoral villages of the mature-phase are likely to have come into prominence through South Bihar planes that acted as the sole buffer area in the process of cultural transformation and village formation." (Chattopadhyay et al, 2006-07:87)

The spread of BRW is associated with village farming cultures of the Gangetic Delta by the first farmers and is a result of-

- the probable movement of such population mainly farming groups from middle Ganga valley
- the spread of ideas and things beyond the middle Ganga Valley itself
- the adaptation of ideas and artefacts by the indigenous forest folks of the Chota Nagpur plateau, adjoining the South Bihar plains and the lower Ganga valley.

The entire process can be represented as a slow process of mode of production, although, hunting, fishing and food collecting still remained a part of daily activities to survive.

It is also important to mention here as Chattopadhyay et al. mentions (2006-07:87) that they were not basic imitators but adopted ideas and practices from the mainstream cultural milieu of the Ganga Valley into a new and organic whole, "capable of developing its own original lines of maturity." (Chattopadhyay et al. 2006-07:87)

archaeological and historical evidence, the presence of human settlement in the territory of West Bengal. We, therefore, can fairly assume that there was a language spoken by these people. The language spoken by those people as evidenced from the development of a proto-Bengali script during the literate period (3rd century BCE) may not resemble the contemporary Bengali language. But as can be said English or Greek in reference to their ancient forms, the contemporary Bengali language can fairly trace its ancestry and genealogy from the proto-Bengali spoken by the people settled around the region of West Bengal. As Dipak Chattopadhyay argues:

Behind the script is the language; behind the language is the articulate personality of a language culture group; behind the group is the social environment whose influence is unconsciously reflected in the formation of script and alphabet which are like both sides of the same coin ... evolved in course of time, within the well-defined geographical boundary of undivided Bengal. (1988: p 113)

The above discussion clearly establishes, through

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Chapter Three

**From Samvaṅgiya
to Bengal:
Early Cultural
Linkages and
Archaeological
Heritage**

Rajat Sanyal

Early Cultural Linkages and Archaeological Heritage

This chapter establishes the ancestry of the linguistic-community called Bengali in Bengal through archaeological and historical evidence. The genesis, evolution and maturation of a language for cultural and artistic expression are contingent upon a linguistic community that uses it. The present chapter clearly establish the presence of a community called the Bengali at different geographical sites of the present-day Bengal from the pre-historic to the historic times. The different janapadas unearthed through archaeological excavations in various parts of Bengal are described in details to arrive at the conclusion of a highly concentrated settlement of people who gave the region its name and language. The Bengali people of these janapadas are known for a complex and developed culture of trade, sophisticated life-style and advanced items of daily use. This chapter, therefore, does the groundwork and prepares us for the larger argument related to our claim for the classical status of the Bengali language.

The key-points of the chapter:

- As Otto Jespersen shows in terms of the development of the English language, the birth and development of any language is dependent on a linguistic community. Archaeological evidence proves the settlement of people in Bengal region from pre-historic times.**
- The various archaeological excavations are utilised to arrive at the conclusion that there were different janapadas in different geographical locations at different historical junctures in Bengal.**
- These janapadas, quite obviously, had a language to perform their daily activities. The findings of Mahasthangarh and other excavations point out that the language used by the people were proto-Bengali that matured into present-day status of the language.**
- The reference to 'Vaṅga' (i.e. the Bengal delta) in classical Sanskrit texts and other documents from the first half of the 1st millennium BCE are utilised to point out that the people of these anapadas were called Bengali.**
- The basic argument in this chapter dovetails with that of the following chapters that establish the pre-eminence of the Bengali people in trade, the development of a distinct Bengali script, the flowering of oral and written literature in the Bengali language cementing its claim as a classical literature.**

Introduction

When did Bengal first witness the use of written script? The answer is firmly engraved, as will be illustrated below, on a tiny piece of stone block found nearly a century ago from Mahasthan in the Bogra/ Bagura district of what is modern Bangladesh. But when did the region experience the earliest use of spoken word is neither recorded in any tangible archaeological record nor is preserved in any ethnographic or linguistic tradition. And, this is true not only for Bengal, but all the other cultural and/or geopolitical regions of eastern India. Then how do we estimate the date of the earliest use of an essentially 'Bengali' mode of the language and script?

While we do have straightforward answer for the former, a number of possibilities mark the latter. Sources on Bengal's historical past are manifold and can be grouped under a large number of epigraphic and transmitted textual sources as well as material evidence. Different early Janapadas of the Bengal delta are referred to in a substantial body of literature from the 1st half of the 1st millennium BCE. Among the noted cultural and political sub-regions of Bengal mentioned in the textual sources are Paṇḍra/Paṇḍraka, Vaṅga, Vaṅgāla, Samataṭa, Harikela/Paṭṭikerā, Suhma, Rāḍha/Lāḍha and the most complicated geo-political identity called Gauḍa. It is not that all these entities appear in one or the other set of sources at a particular point of time. There is enormous geochronological disparity in the pattern of occurrence of the above geographical terms in textual sources.

As for the second question, one has to

initiate by trying to trace the earliest use of the 'Bengali' akṣara in the ancient Indian context. It is of paramount significance to note that among all the eastern Indian writing systems, it is only Bengali that appears in its salient writing form, in an inscription of c. 3rd century BCE. The question is how? As we are aware the earliest undisputed evidence of writing in historical India is vindicated by the edicts of the Maurya emperor Aśoka. His inscriptions have been found across the length and breadth of his dominion, from almost all the geographical-cultural terrains of the subcontinent. One such set of what is terminologically labelled as the 'Major Rock Edicts' of Aśoka, come from Girnar in Gujarat.

A.H. Dani, in his well-known and unanimously accepted work on the subject of writing systems of early India, has drawn our attention to one very important occurrence of a ligature in the Aśokan inscriptions from Girnar. The ligature with a second element with labial <ba> is found only in the Girnar edict of Aśoka. But this labial <ba> has been used in the word *dbādasa* (i.e., *dvādaśa*) which should have carried the semi-vowel <va>. Clearly it is not a mistake as some other places of the same inscription has the same labial <ba>, for semi-vowel <va>. Dani has rightly observed that the person who composed the inscription must have come from Bengal, the only linguistic 'zone' where both these sounds are indiscriminately spoken and written as <ba>. This undeniable evidence shows that the journey of the Bengali language began as early as 3rd century BCE, even if we do not have any other documentary evidence to argue the actual use of this language.

The formation of the conjuncts

The conjuncts are formed by placing one consonant on the top of the other. Unlike the practice in modern Indian scripts, the first letter is fully formed and the second is cursively added. According to the later rule the first letter should be mutilated, so as to drop its vowel, as the Sanskrit grammar requires, but this is not the case in Aśokan Brāhmī.¹ In Aśokan Brāhmī the following conjuncts are found:

(i) Having the second element *ya*:

kya, khya, gya, chya, tya, dhya, nya, bhya, mya, vya, sya, and hya.

In all these cases *ya* comes later, except in the Girnar R.E. where *vya* is spelt like *yva*. G. H. Ojha takes this as a mistake, and, judging from the practice in all other inscriptions, I think Ojha is right.

(ii) Having the second element *va*:

tva, dva, rva, śva, sva, and hva.

In all these cases *va* comes later, and is added, sometimes with its vertical and at times without it, to the right, centre, or left.

(iii) Having the second element *ba*.

There is only one word, *dvādasa*, which is spelt sometimes with *va* and sometimes with *ba* in the Girnar R.E. Does this mean that the writer of the Girnar R.E. hailed from Bengal?

(iv) Having the second element *ra*:

kra, tra, dra, pra, vra, and sra.

This conjunct is very ingeniously formed. As the letter *ra* makes a serpentine vertical, in conjunction with another letter it replaces the straight vertical of that letter. When this conjunct is drawn, the letter *ra* is formed first and the other consonant follows. *Ra* is fully drawn and the second letter is added in abbreviated form. Normally the first component of a conjunct is placed above the second, but this is an exception. It is for this reason that the same sign is read as *sra* and *rsa*, or *vra* and *rva*. In the case of *dra* in Mysore inscriptions both the verticals are serpentine. On the evidence of this principle the reading of *dra* in Jaugad R.E. IV, line 3, by Hultzsch is not justified. Similarly, in the Bairat M.R.I., line 3,

¹ Cf. Bühler's remark on p. 15 of his *Indian Palaeography*, where he is mistaken.

(iii) Having the second element *ba*.

There is only one word, *dvādasa*, which is spelt sometimes with *va* and sometimes with *ba* in the Girnar R.E. Does this mean that the writer of the Girnar R.E. hailed from Bengal?

Plate. Ahmed Hasan Dani has argued that the indistinct use of labial and semi-vowel *ba/va* in Aśokan inscriptions suggests that the composer came from Bengal, where this orthoepic characteristic is still current. (Image source: Dani, 1997, p. 44)

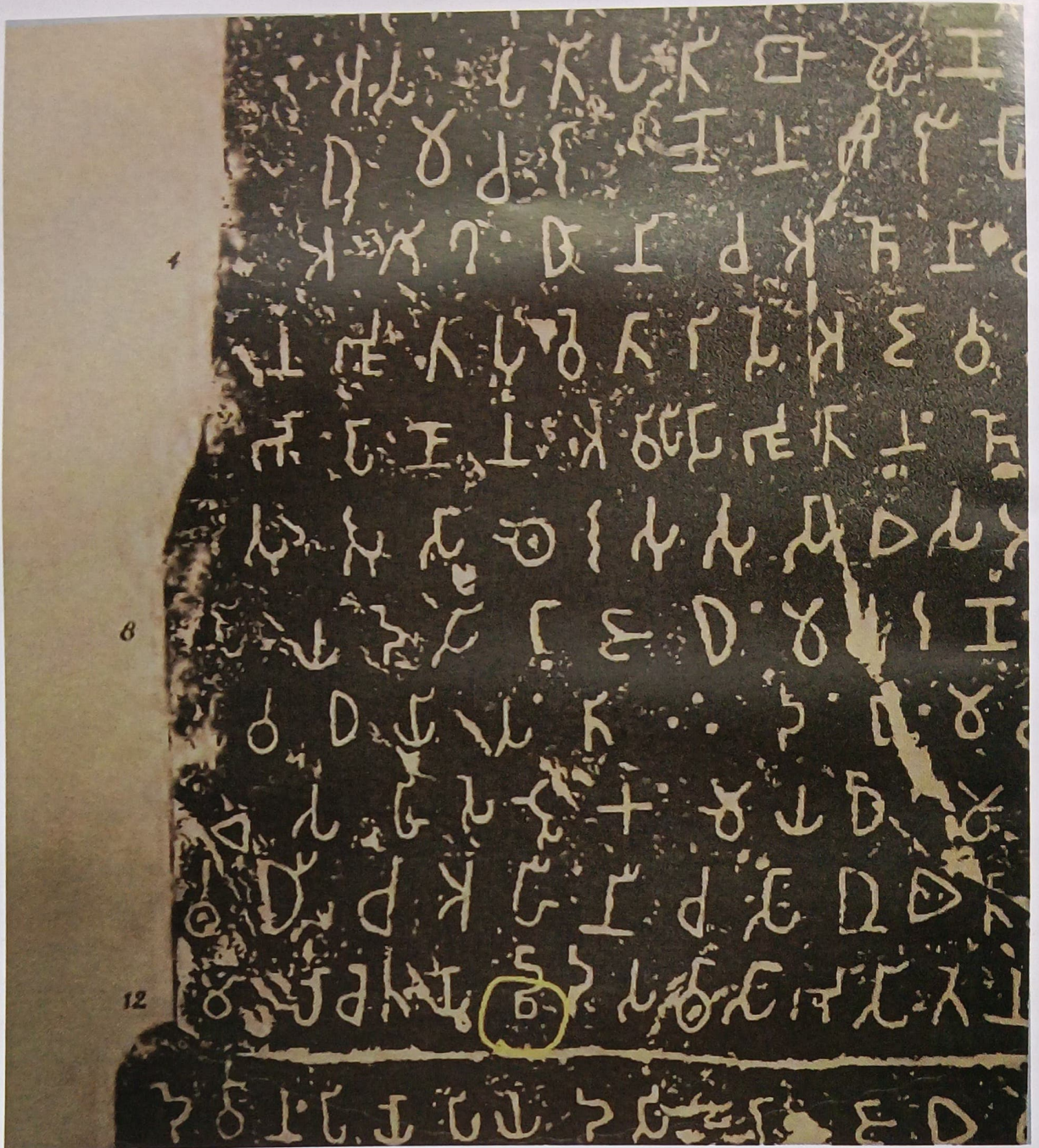


Plate. Indistinct use of labial and semi-vowel ba/va in the Aśokan inscriptions of third century BCE is a clear marker of the speech being in use in Bengal, having this orthoepic character (Image source: Jas Burgess (ed.), 1894, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. II, p. 452 [plate])

Puṇḍanagala vis-à-vis Samvāṅgiya

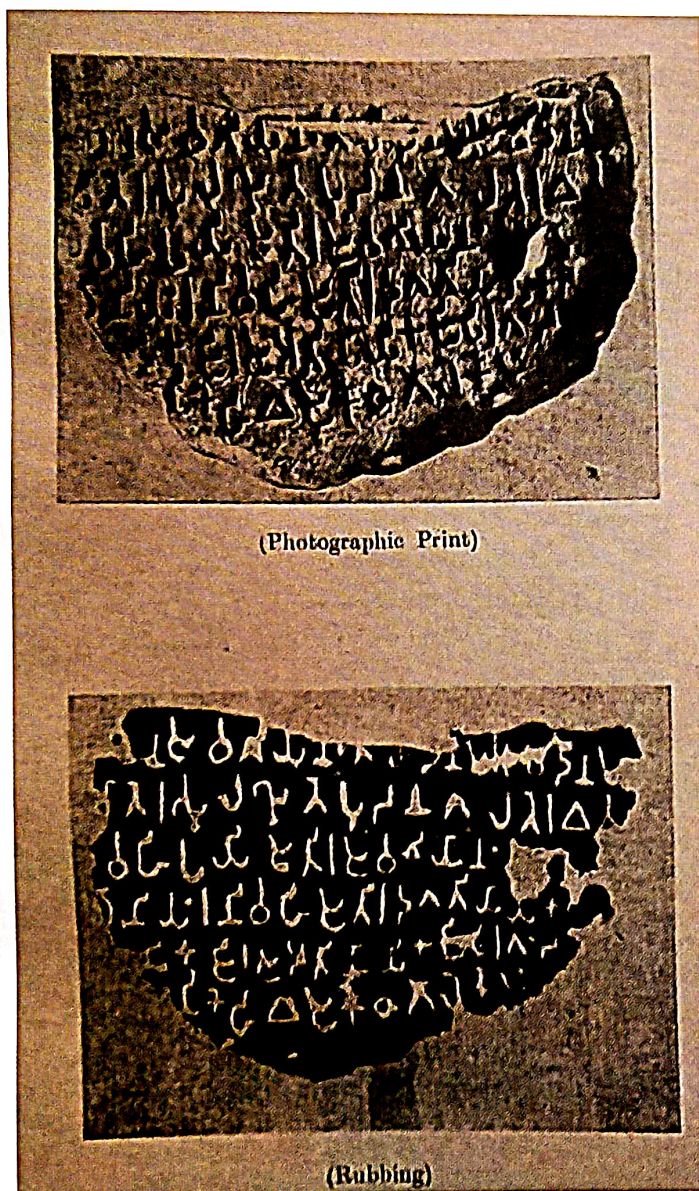
Puṇḍranagara in Puṇḍravardhanabhukti was a prominent ancient urban centre in the eastern region of the Indian subcontinent. The site is now identified with the current city of Mahasthan, located in Bogra, Bangladesh. The ancient site was situated on the banks of the once mighty Karatoya river, but

now it has become a small stream. From archaeological and literary sources we come to know that Puṇḍranagara was a vibrant administrative, religious & cultural centre from the 3rd century BCE to the 12th century CE. Numerous excavation and exploration work at sites such as Khodar Pathar Dhap, Mankhali(r) Dhap(Salles, 2018, p-291-316) and the eastern rampart area (1993-2000) have revealed the presence of several

Plate. Image and ink impression of the Mahasthan inscription, the earliest epigraphic record from Bengal dated in the third/second century BCE (after Sircar 1965).

architectural remains such as city walls, gate, common dwellings, assembly halls, and also Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist religious architectures like temples and, vihāra. Some of the sites have unearthed multiple occupation layers going back to the 3rd century BCE and have revealed artefacts such as Northern black polished ware, terracotta plaque, ring stones, bronze mirrors, bronze lamps, dice-cast

coins, and stone beads representing the characteristics of the Mauryan periods. From the early historic times till the medieval era issuing inscriptions on stone and other materials—copperplate, stone slab, terracotta seal and sealing, etc. was a common practice in ancient Bengal. Yet due to the lack of confirmatory inscriptional data, the Mauryan supremacy over this region is debated among scholars. Generally, during the Gupta era, these inscriptions were issued by the kings to signify various occasions like the establishment of religious institutions, donations, and also for administrative purposes. Among all the inscriptions of this region, the earliest administrative inscriptional record was discovered from Mahasthangarh, made of a stone plaque commonly known as Mahasthangarh stone plaque Inscription. A brief account of it is given below.



(Photographic Print)

(Rubbing)

MAHASTHAN STONE PLAQUES INSCRIPTION

Discovery and other Details

The Mahasthangarh Brāhmī inscription is a small record of seven lines carved on a circular limestone slab, the upper part of which is partially broken. The size of the inscription was 4.4 cm x 5.7 cm. The inscription was an accidental discovery by a day labour Baru Faqir on the 30th of November 1931 who was excavating the land near the already excavated ruins of Mahasthangarh for farming purposes. G.C. Chandra, the then Superintendent Archaeologist, the Archaeological Survey of India, eastern circle acquired it, which eventually under the direction of the director general of Archaeological Survey of India K.N. Dixit was sent to the Indian Museum, Calcutta (Bhandarkar, 1931-32, p.85).

Historiography

The ancient ruin of Puṇḍranagara was first discovered by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1879 and he was extremely disappointed to see the condition of the site. Cunningham (Cunningham, 1882, p. 106-109) presumed:

The place is so extensive & in many parts especially amongst, the brick ruins, so thickly covered with jungal, that it is impossible to make any satisfactory exploration, save at a great waste of both time & money.

Sir Alexander Cunningham was correct in assuming that the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang's (Watters, 1905, p.63) description of Puṇḍravardhana (or Pun-na-fa-tan-na as he wrote in Chinese) is the same as this ancient walled city. He observed that its circumference was about eight miles. However, behind what Cunningham considered a 'waste of time & money' laid the glorious heritage. Exploration during the British period under the direction of K.N. Dixit (Dixit, 1933, pp. 87-97) led to a renewed interest in the past of Puṇḍravardhana which led to excavation and subsequent discovery of monuments. As in the case of inscription it was a chance discovery that eventually under the guidance of the Archaeological Survey of India ended up in the Indian Museum, Calcutta collection. After the discovery of the plaque, a brief note on the content of the inscription was published in the columns of the Bengali newspaper *Baṅga-bāṇī*. The next most prominent note on the inscription appeared in 'Liberty' on 2nd April 1932, although this also failed to properly

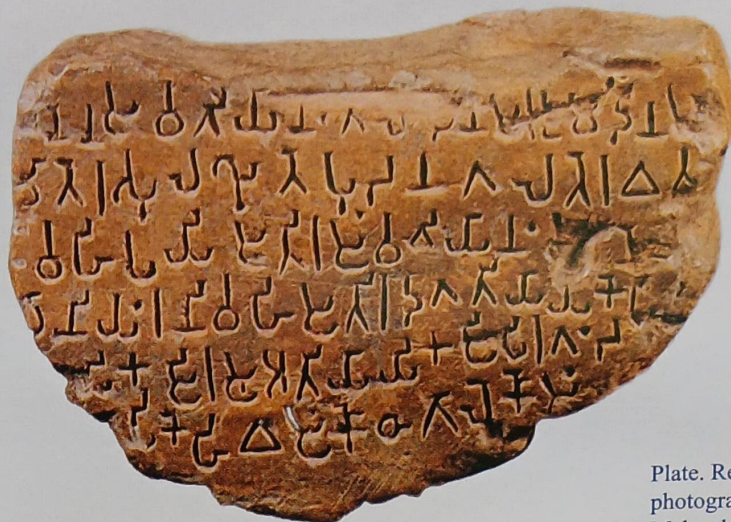


Plate. Recent photograph of Mahasthan stone plaque inscription (courtesy Indian Museum, Kolkata).

exhibit the importance of this inscription. The inscription was for the first time properly evaluated by D.R. Bhandarkar (Bhandarkar, 1932-33, p.84) after he was sent an impression of the inscription by Hirananda Sastri, the Government epigraphist of India, and eventually, a photograph was also sent by the then Director General of Archaeological survey of India. But, it was only after he was able to inspect the plaque at the Indian Museum Bhandarkar realised the importance of this inscription, and went on to publish it in *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. 21, 1931-32. Since then several scholars like B.M. Barua (Barua, 1934, p.57), D.C. Sircar (Sircar, 1965, p. 80.), Paola G Tinti (Tinti, 1996, p. 36), R Mukherji and S.K. Maity (Mukherji and Maity, 1967, p.40) have incessantly proposed new dates, readings, and interpretations of this age-old inscription.

Transliteration by D.R.

Bhandarkar: (Bhandarkar, 1931-32, p.85)

1. nena Sa[m*] va[m*] gīy[ā]naṃ
[Galadanasa] | Dumadina [mahā*]

2. mate | sulakhitePuṇḍanagalate |
e[ta]m

3. [ni*] vahipayisati | Samva[m*]
giyānaṁ [cha di*] ne [tathā*]

4. [dha*] niyaṁ | nivahisati |
da[m*]g[ā*] tiyāy[i*] k[e] d[evā*]

5. [tiyā*] [yi] kasi | su-atiyāyika[si]
pi | gaṁḍa[kehi*]

6. [dhāni*] [yei]
kehiesakoṭhāgālekosam [bhara*]-

7. [ṇīye]

Transliteration by B.M. Barua
(Barua, 1934, p. 57)

L1. [a] nenasavagiyānaṁ t[e]lad[i]
nasadumaṁ dine S[u-

L2. Mate s[u]
lakhitepuṇḍanagalateetaṁ

L3. Nivahipayisati [.] savagiyānaṁ
ca[di]ne

L4. dhāniyaṁnivahisati [.]
Dagatiyāy[i]ke pi a[gi-]

L5. [tiyā]yikasisuatiyāyikashi pi
gaṁḍa [kehi]

L6. [kākani]
yikehiesakoṭhagalekosam --

L7. - - - [.]

Transliteration by D.C. Sircar:
(Sircar, 1965, p. 80.)

1. Nena [l*] sa[m]vagiya[nā]naṁ [tala
dana s-] | sapadina | [su]

2. m[ā] te | sulakhitepuṇḍanagalate
| e[ta]m

3. [ni*]vahipayisati | savagiyānaṁ
[ca] [di*] ne * *

4. [dhā] niyaṁ | nivahisati | daga-
tiyāyike * *

5. *** [yi]kasi | su-sta-tiyāyika[si] pi
| gaṁḍa [kehi*]

6.*** [yi]kehiesakoṭhagalekosam *
* *

7. ****

Palaeography and Language

The script used in the inscription is initially identified by Bhandarkar (Bhandarkar D.R., 1931-32, p. 84-85) as Mauryan Brāhmī as according to the scholar the script heavily resembles that of Aśokan inscription found at sites like Kalsi. However, it will be more apt to use the term early Brāhmī which is based on chronology rather than any dynasty-oriented nomenclature (Sander, 2007) as dynasties other than Mauryans also used this script. The only difference seen in the script of the Mahasthangarh inscription is that the vertical parts of some letters like *t*, *p*, *h*, *v* and *s* were more prolonged than the general script used in the Aśokan inscriptions (Bhandarkar, 1931-32, p. 85). There also seems to be confusion regarding the use of *s* and Palatal *s* in the script. But overall the inscription is similar in form to other inscriptions of its time. Another feature of this inscription is the constant and proper

use of perpendicular strokes as a *virāma* or stop to mark the clauses and words. We can observe a sharp contrast between the arbitrary use of *virāma* in inscriptions like the Kalsi rock edict and the Sasaram edicts of Emperor Aśoka. There are certain Palaeographic characteristics of the inscription, such as the absence of distinction of vowel length, mostly for vowels other than *a* and *ā*. This inscription also has a few variant letter forms but due to the paucity of materials, it is difficult to evaluate the Mahasthangarh inscription's chronological significance. While some scholars like Bhandarkar have taken the palaeographic features as an indication of their pre-Aśokan antiquity; the very same phenomena have been invoked by others like Dani (Dani, 1986) in support of arguments for a later date of the script.

The language of the inscription is Prakrit, but the influence of Māgadhī or the court language of Magadha is discernible. Like the majority of the Aśokan inscriptions, including all the pillar edicts and minor rock edicts (MRE) as well as the rock edicts at Kalsi, Dhauli, Jaugada, and Erragudi, the Mahasthangarh inscription dialect also had some distinctive features such as:

- A. The dialect has only *l* for Sanskrit *r*; e.g., *lājā* = *rājā*
- B. The words ending with *o* were turned to *e*.

As regards the orthography of the inscription, the doubling consonants caused by assimilation are not graphically shown. This accords on the whole with the later literary Prakrit known as Ardha-Māgadhī which has been called

by Lüders (Lüders, 1973) "Old Ardha-Māgadhī". The inscription had the typical Ardha-Māgadhī features of the "Chancellery Language". Thus, according to Salomon (Salomon, 1998, p. 12) the Mahasthangarh inscription seems to reflect a more colloquial and/or archaic variety of this dialect.

Significance of the Inscription

After an analytical study of the orthography and linguistics of the record, D. R. Bhandarkar came to the decision that, although the first line of the record, where the name of the king or, the authority inscribing it (if any) might have been mentioned, is lost, it is still quite probable that the language is Prakrit of Madhyadeśa influenced by Māgadhī and the script is fairly that found in the later rock edicts of Aśoka. So, it seems that some ruler of the Mauryan period, if not of the Mauryan family, was ruling in North Bengal at that time.

Another very important aspect of political history is revealed through the inscription. It records an order issued by some ruler to the Mahāmātra stationed at Puṇḍranagara (i.e. Puṇḍranagara identified with Mahāsthāna in northern Bangladesh) with a view to relieving the distress of the people called the Saṁvaṅgīyas, who were settled in and around the town by distributing paddy (*dhānyam*) and coins (*gaṁḍaka*) during the calamities caused by supernatural agencies. The inscription speaks of 4 requisites viz. *tela* (oil), *duma* (tree), *dhānyam* (paddy), and two varieties of small coins *gaṁḍaka* and *kakanyika*. The storehouse (*kothāgāla* / *koṣṭhāgāra*) had to be filled up with these requisites as provisions against any emergency caused

by natural calamities.

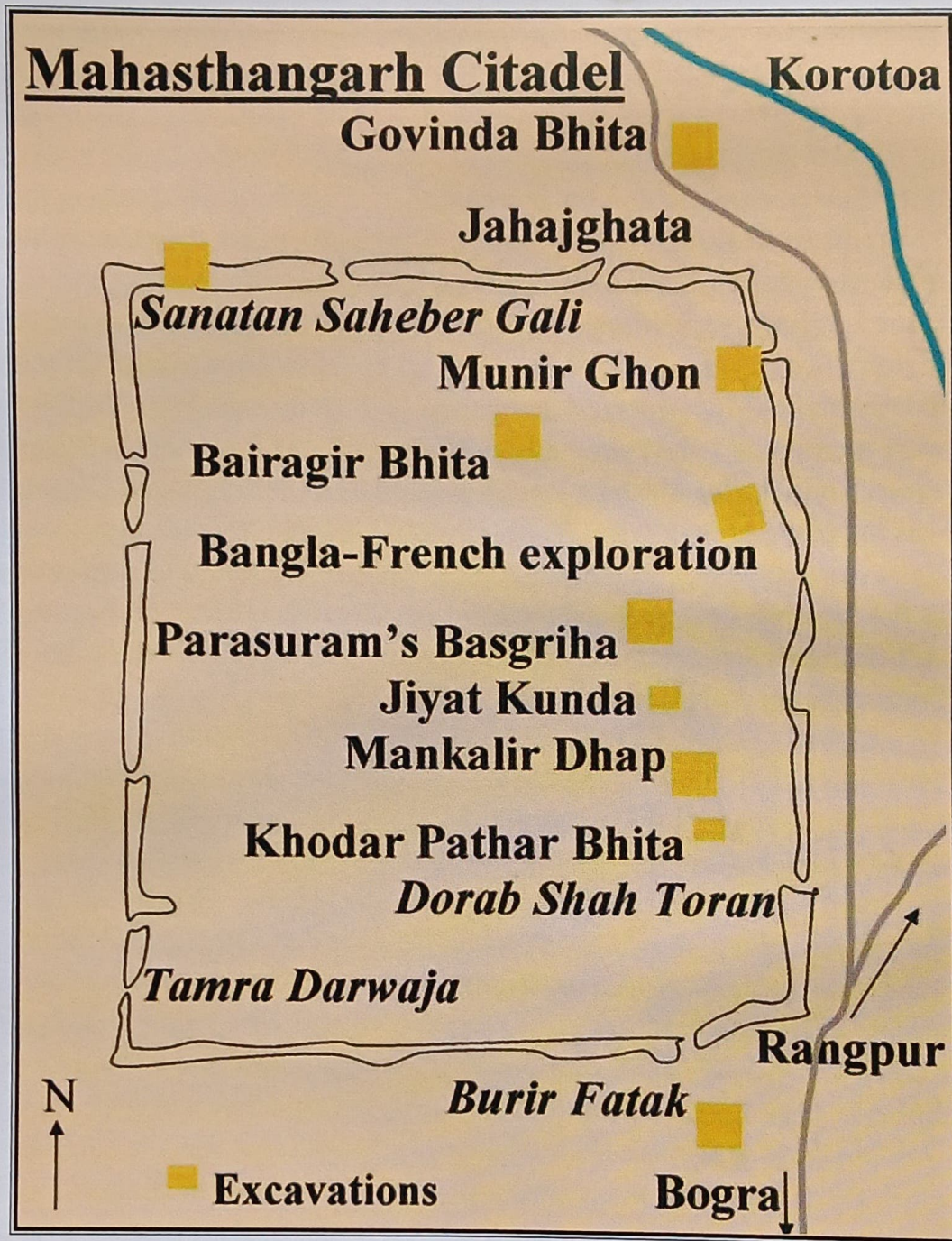
D. R. Bhandarkar did not highlight what kind of calamity is emphasized in the record; but Barua (Barua, 1934, p. 57) insisted later that at least 3 kinds of calamities, i.e., calamities caused by water (*dagatiyāyika*), calamities caused by fire (*agatiyāyika*) and calamities caused by parrot/ locusts (*suatiyāyika*) are individually mentioned in the inscription. The most controversial word found in the very first line of the inscription is the *Samvaṃgīya* (the people of the region). According to D. R. Bhandarkar, in later Vedic texts, names of three clans were mentioned – the *Paṇḍra* people, *Vaṅga*, and *Vaṅgīya* of which *Paṇḍra* was the most powerful clan. These three clans were perhaps grouped together as the *Samvaṃgīya* group; who were settled in and around the ancient town *Puṇḍranagara* / *Puṇḍravardhana*.

Several scholars consider the term *sa[m]vagiya[ā]naṃ* as the *śaḍvargika* sect of the Buddhists. In both descriptions, Bhandarkar and Barua agree that they were a group of men resident of *Puṇḍravardhana*. However, regarding the nature of the aforementioned clan Barua (Barua, 1934, p. 57) has a completely different view. Taking into account the example given in *Gabbhinisutta*, Barua concludes that royal stores were kept up to supply oil and clarified butter to all 'men of religion' like *Śramaṇa* or *Brāhmaṇa*.

Thus according to Barua, the text supports the claim that the group of men mentioned in the inscription was members of a holy order. If the *sa[m]va[m]giya[ā]naṃ* were a Buddhist sect

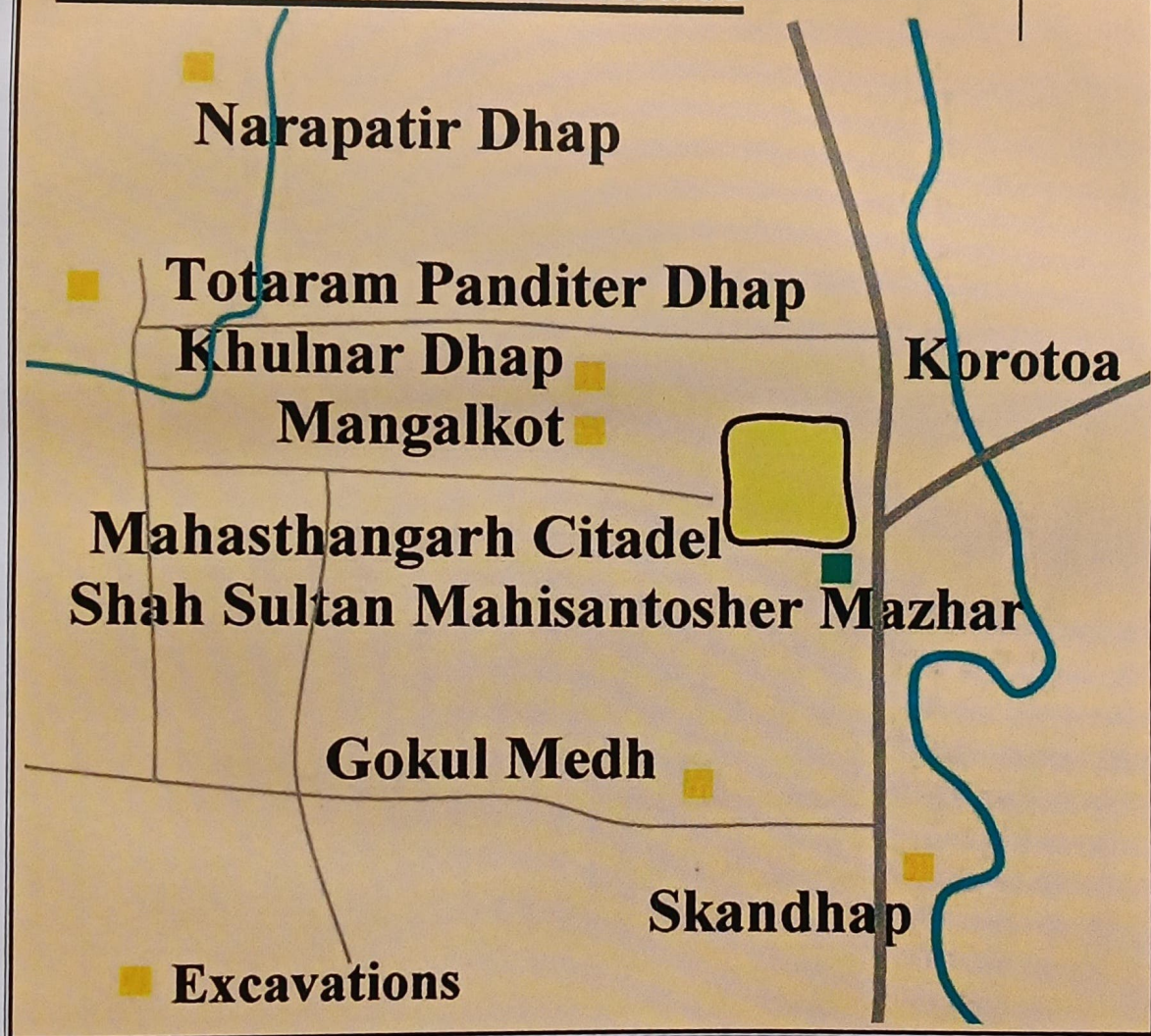
then this inscription should be the earliest evidence of written record about Buddhism in Bangladesh. The existence of a Buddhist community in ancient Bengal was not entirely uncommon. Three stone inscriptions related to the existence of the Buddhist community in early historic Bangladesh have been found from Sanchi Stupa (Buhler, 1892-94, p.108). Located in Madhya Pradesh, India and established by Emperor Aśoka in the 3rd century BCE there are two inscriptions that record that the south gate of this stūpa was built with financial support from Dharmadatta and Risinandana, inhabitants of *Puṇḍranagara*. The third inscription has been found at Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh, (Vogel, 1929-30, p.22) India. This inscription belongs to the 3rd century CE and records *Vaṅga*, along with other countries, as the centre of the *Hīnayāna* Buddhist *Samgha*.

Another view regarding the use of the word *saṃvagiyaṇa* was put forward by Sircar (Sircar, 1965, p. 80), as he proposed *saṃvagiyaṇa* to be a name of a locality. Whereas other scholars like Tinti (Tinti, 1996, p.36) still support reading by Bhandarkar and have suggested that the *sa[m]vagiya[ā]naṃ* were a tribe, not a Buddhist community, the historical importance of the record lies in the fact that it is the earliest evidence that suggests the authority of the Mauryas in the *Puṇḍravardhana* area. It provides us with the first definite evidence of urbanization in Bengal. The inscription throws light on the circulation of cowries as a medium of exchange in the area of *Puṇḍravardhana*. It also alludes to the miseries of the people due to natural calamities and the relief measures adopted by the ruling administration.



Map of the fortified settlement at Mahasthangarh (Courtesy By P.K. Niyogi at the English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10513152>)
 Image Source : <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10513152>

Mahasthangarh: Suburb of the Citadel



Plan of the City of Puṇḍranagara (Courtesy By P.K. Niyogi at the English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10513153>)

Image Source : <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10513153>



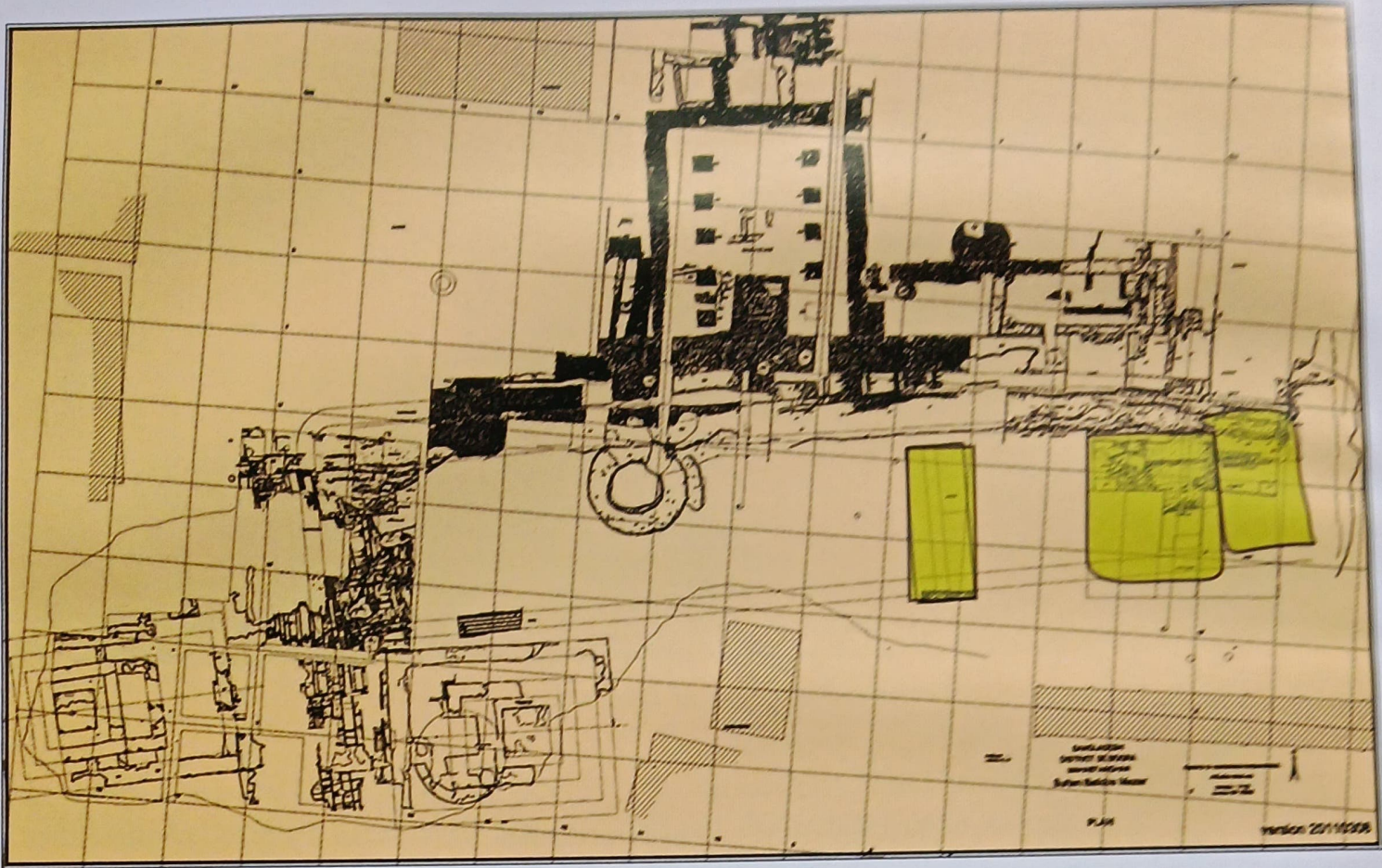
Citadel of Mahasthan with location of excavated sites. (After Coline Lefrancq, 2016)



Plate. Bastion on either side of the eastern gateway of Mahasthagarh (After J.F. Salles, 2018)

The famous archaeological site in Bangladesh, named Mahasthan, lies 13 km north of Bogra city. Since the early Mauryan period (late 4th century BCE), it has been standing as a major centre of Eastern India on the banks of the Karatoya river. Of the Gupta phase very few and elusive architectural remains stratigraphically datable to the period (4th-6th centuries CE) have been discovered in the Mazar area. Another structure in the Eastern Rampart area (3rd-6th centuries CE), is identified as a stupa without too much solid evidence. From the post-Gupta period, excavations at Vashu Vihara proved that the earliest layers of human occupation at one of the monasteries could be dated back to the 6th-7th centuries CE. The 5th-7th centuries may be considered to be the period of development of a vast Buddhist settlement in Bengal and a significant time in the religious history of Mahasthan.

As for the Pāla-Sena times at Mahasthan, and the so called 'Turkish' conquest, the condition of Puṇḍranagara/Mahasthan during 8th – 12th Century CE cannot be properly understood from the textual sources. The available textual sources do not relate the city to any of the Pāla or Sena kings and it should be noted that the propagated 'traditions' of a beautiful and wealthy centre in the late 12th century and its conquest by the Muslims is not based on any kind of authentic sources. However, further excavations in the Mazar area exposed a small part of a probable evidence of the ancient splendour of the city. A great phase of re-construction of the south-eastern rampart was discovered in the western part of the Mazar excavation, to be provisionally dated back to the beginning of the Pāla period, 8th-9th centuries CE. A monumental gate was exposed on the top of the rampart slope; two successive



entrances were figured out, one associated with the southward slope, and behind a well-built reads. The gate is well integrated in the upper rampart construction with medium sized complete bricks and the thresholds of the two entrances were nicely paved with re-used stone slabs. The location of this important gate probably agrees with Cunningham's Burir Darwaza. This monumental and majestic gate can be considered as the main evidence of Mahasthan being the so-called headquarters of the Pāla dynasty, at least in its early period.

Excavations have shown that the rampart wall went through numerous rebuilding. Debates continued over the number of doors. Through the

southern wall, one monumental gate was uncovered during the 2010-2011 season of excavation, locally called Burir darwaza, 'the door of the old woman'; no other one was ever mentioned. In the southern part of the site, a 'route', ran across the city close to the Mazar area: from the Dorab Shah gate in the South-East it leads to the Tamra darwaza to the West and outside the city to Vihara and other villages. Excavations were carried out in the area of Mazar mosque, displaying remnants of earlier religious buildings; the poorly preserved remains of a Hindu temple were found in 1965-1966, which exposed a stone Nandi bull, a copper casket and terracotta plaques, all of which can be dated

Plate. Plan of excavation of the Mazar area, Mahasthan (After Coline Lefrancq, 2016)

(Rampart of First Phase)



Plate. Excavated structural complex at Mahasthan (After Coline Lefrancq, 2016)

back to the 8th century and the early Pāla period. The Khodar Pathar Dhap is a massive block of black granite, 3.36 m long and 0.92 m wide and three tons in weight according to Cunningham, which had been the threshold of a very large monument; the door-sockets were still visible, and a floral decoration was found carved in the middle of the face in view. The Mankhali(r) Dhap is small mound which is crowned by the remains of a pre-Mughal mosque exposed during the 1965-1966 excavations.

Another excavated structure called 'Parasuram Bari' showed rather ordinary style of construction comprising of small bricks with lime surki plaster and fine limewash and it represented some sort of a 'downgraded' Mughal architecture, the "pavilion" one: four rooms raised about 150 m from the floor around a square courtyard, in front of the habitation quarters, the whole being closed by a protection wall with pillbox gates in the

East and the West. From the Eastern Rampart area, eighteen layers of human occupation were recognised, the 'virgin soil' (a geological deposit well-known in Bangladesh as the 'Madhupur formation', a recent deposit of the Holocene times, i.e., after 10,000 BP) being reached at 7.5 m below the surface. Also, six main historical-stratigraphic periods were identified from the Eastern Rampart area. The Bairagi Bhita (or 'the anchorite

building') Temples comprised a major religious centre of Mahasthan, which consisted of three main temples along with at least five circular and rectangular well-built brick reservoirs (3 × 1.50 m), as well as five wells and a large built platform opposite the third temple. The Mogadasa Temple mound is located c. 200 m southwards of the rampart wall, on the top of which there is tomb of a 'saint' and a mosque which are also pilgrimage sites. The Govinda Bhita Temples (two temples, one very close to the other, parallel and both orientated W-E, clearly dated to different periods) are located c. 150 m from the north-eastern corner of the rampart wall, on a small mound. During the 2009-2010 season of the Mazar excavations it became clear by several relevant findings that a part of the site of Mahasthan was affected by an earthquake, although this hypothesis of an 'earthquake' is not a proven fact.

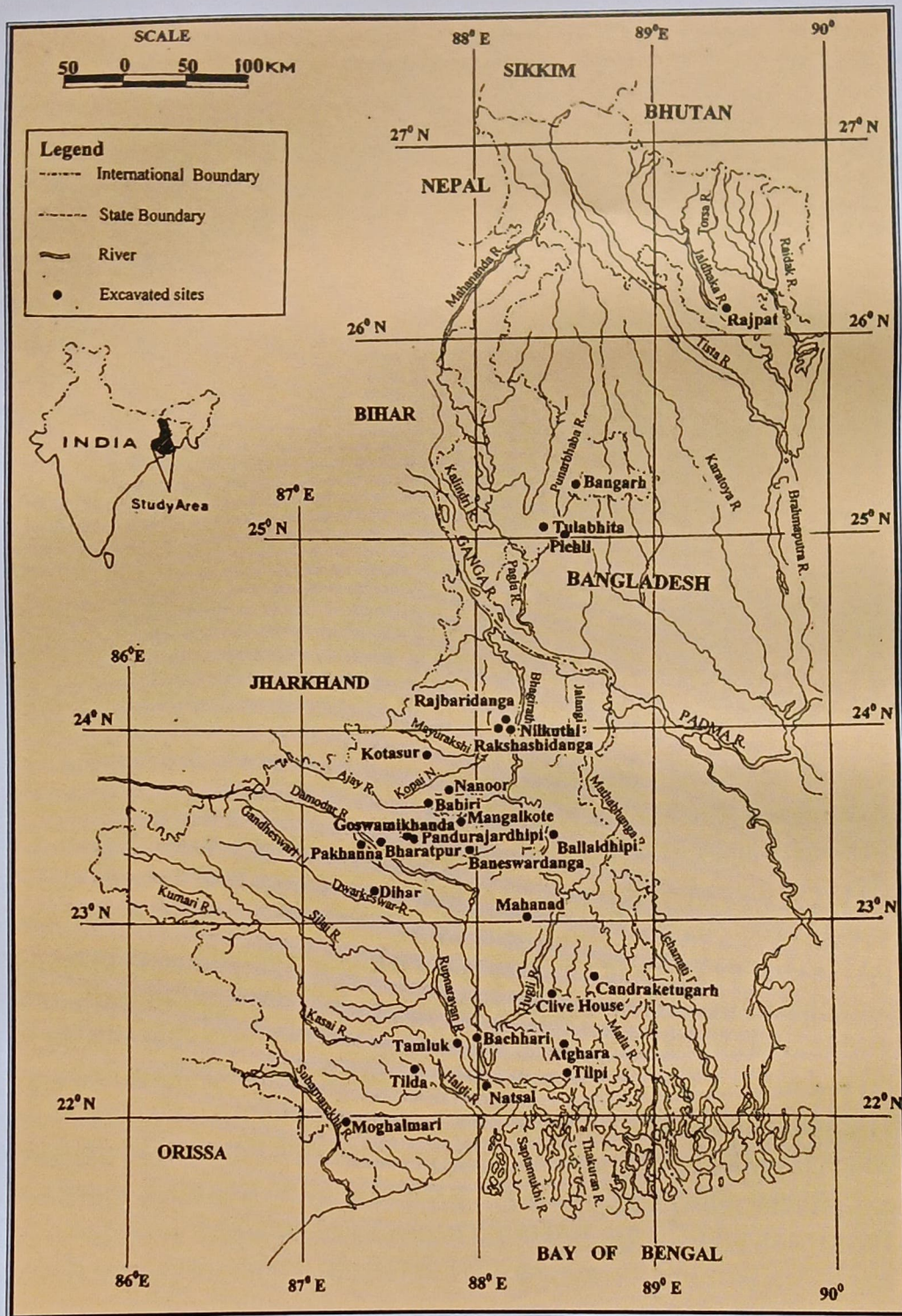


Plate. Major excavated early sites in West Bengal (after Sanyal 2008).

From Puṇḍranagara to Bengal

Political system from the level of the state to that of the village, in early mediaeval Bengal, is a tiered system of arrangement developed in terms of the spatial limits of territories involved. Furthermore, in spite of their somewhat obscure nature of reference to the character

of settlement locales in a particular region, almost all the Bengal epigraphs, with few exceptions, are in one respect homogeneous in that they always precisely state the actual location of the granted land in relation to the larger frame of settlement hierarchy, in many cases with a fairly comprehensive account of the natural and artificial boundaries

of rural level settlements. All the administrative settlements are arranged in the grant portions of inscriptions, invariably in a descending order of orientation, in terms of spatial limits of the settlements involved. When compared to early records, those from tenth century provide a more systematic pattern of orientation of the administrative hierarchy (this contrast is quite apparent when one compares the details provided in Appendices I and II). Thus, the system of hierarchy between the fifth and the seventh centuries shows that the highest tier of the configuration is the *bhukti* or the provincial administrative unit; this is followed mostly by a *viṣaya* or the district level unit or a *vīthī*, which is either equivalent to *viṣaya* or inferior to it; at the lowest level of the ladder stands the *grāma* or the village. Significantly enough, all the tiers of administration from the *viṣaya* to the *grāma* are seen in these records to operate through certain categories of internal administrative bodies (*adhikaraṇas*) and in consequence they function more or less in close reciprocal interaction to each other.

From mid-seventh century onwards there appears in many inscriptions the name of a territorial administrative unit called *maṇḍala*, which is sometimes (spatially) larger than the *viṣaya* and sometimes smaller. From tenth century, inscriptions refer to rapid proliferation of this territorial unit across the Delta. From the twelfth century several hitherto unknown administrative settlements turn up in epigraphic records.

In spite of continuous reorientations in the hierarchy of administrative settlements, the unit named *bhukti* remained hierarchically

the highest, and per se the largest, administrative centre from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries. But while Puṇḍravardhana formed the only *bhukti* level settlement of the Gupta and post-Gupta periods with no less than five *viṣayas*, with the expansion of the Sena power there appeared as many as three *bhuktis* like Pauṇḍravardhana, Vardhamāna and Kaṅkagrāma, the last one being formed by 'parcelling out' Uttara Rāḍha from the Vardhamānabhukti.

Since Puṇḍravardhana was not only the biggest, but also the most prominent of the provincial divisions, it may form the initial point of inquiry. The Mahasthan stone inscription (of c. third-second century BCE), the earliest epigraphic testimony to the term Puṇḍra, described it as a *nagala* ('city') of northern Bengal having a racial connotation attached to it owing to the Pauṇḍra group of people, who occupied the region in early historic times. Subsequent epigraphic records of Gupta period refer to the region as Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* (province), thereby implying an expanded territorial identity of the settlement. But quite interestingly, from early tenth century three variants of this place-name occur in Bengal inscriptions: a. Puṇḍravardhana, b. Pauṇḍra and c. Pauṇḍravardhana. These variations have been rightly explicated in terms of either expansion of this territory into south-southeastern Bengal, or occasional confinement in southern Bengal. But the issue that appears more auguring is how this supposed 'expansion' is interpreted in the present historiography on the problem. It has been suggested that this expansion took place either due to the

extension of Pāla power in the south or to a 'tribal movement.' But a thorough observation on the occurrence of these terms in inscriptions, when combined with the general pattern of distribution of charters, tends to reveal a different picture, as we shall try to illustrate below.

Empirical validity of the *extension of power* hypothesis rests on the discovery of the Mandhuk image inscription (c. CE 967/69) of Gopāla III and the Baghaura and Narayanpur image inscriptions (c. CE 986/988 and c. CE 988/990 respectively) of Mahīpāla I from the Comilla regions of modern Bangladesh. But interestingly enough, the earliest reference to the term Pauṇḍravardhana occurs in the Paschimbhag copper plate of Śrīcandra in c. CE 930-31, nearly half a century before these inscriptions were drafted. All the subsequent Candra inscriptions up to the eleventh century refer to the region as Pauṇḍrabhukti. But the contemporary Pāla epigraphs (of Rājyapāla, Gopāla III and Mahīpāla I) donating land in north Bengal still continue the term Puṇḍravardhana. Interestingly, the twelfth and thirteenth century epigraphs, which mostly record land grants beyond the geographical orbit of north Bengal, unmistakably refer to the region as Pauṇḍravardhana. More curiously, the twelfth century plates of Madanapāla from Manahali and Rajibpur as well as the near contemporary Tarpandighi copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena -- all of them definitely recording land transfer within north Bengal -- mention the province as the Pauṇḍravardhanabhukti. Although the published transcriptions of the two Rajibpur plates read the term as Puṇḍravardhana, a closer look into the plate easily enables one to identify the

medial vowel attached to pa as au and not u. The same incident happens with the Charpatra Mura (Mainamati) plate of Vīradharadeva in which the place has been read as Puṇḍravardhana, but the published photographs clearly shows that the portion reads Śrī-Pauṇḍravardhana.

Some of the more noteworthy points that emerge from the above review are: (a) the name Pauṇḍravardhana was well in existence before the southern-southeastern parts of Bengal were consolidated by the Pālas and therefore, at the present state of affairs, nothing can be certainly said about whether the change from Puṇḍravardhana to Pauṇḍravardhana had anything to do with this consolidation of power; (b) there is no definite evidence on the 'tribal movement' theory that can be directly related to this shift; (c) from around the middle of the twelfth century Pauṇḍravardhana geophysically encompassed the entire landscape steadily shaped by the hydrographic configuration of the Ganga and its major branches, thus ruling out any probability of a scribal mistake for the case of the Manahali plate, as it was suggested earlier; (d) occurrence of a number of morphological variants of a particular place-name was neither arbitrary nor probably related to any specific political development. Thus, the shift from of the name Puṇḍravardhana to Pauṇḍravardhana was simply a response to the gradual expansion of the landscape. The basic difference between the names Puṇḍra and Pauṇḍra can at best be compared with that between the terms 'Pāṇini' and 'Pāṇinīya'. When we talk of Pāṇini, we essentially and implicitly mean *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the text

attributed to him, but the term *Pāṇiniya* necessarily incorporates the whole range of literature by and on Pāṇini including those of his mediaeval commentators. Likewise, Puṇḍra might have initially formed the urban core of that settlement in north Bengal, but came to be identified as Pauṇḍravardhana in course of its territorial expansion. One cannot be more than speculative, however, on the actual bearings of the Gangetic morphology on the shape of this geographically expanded space.

Important Political Units and Janapadas of Ancient Bengal

The earliest references to Vaṅga occur in the Vedic literature. The *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* of the *Ṛgveda* and the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* mention its name. According to Sir George Birdwood, Vaṅga originally included the districts of Burdwan and Nadia. Its name is also found in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, the *Yoginītantra* and many other works. The Jaina Upāṅga *Pannavaṇā* which can be dated to the 2nd or the 1st century B.C. places the Tāmralipta country within Vaṅga. The Vaṅga country is equated with the country of Gaṅgā in some early Chinese sources datable to the early centuries of the Christian era. Kālidāsa places the Vaṅgas in the delta formed by the Gaṅgā and Brahmaputra. The first epigraphic reference to this country is probably found in the Meharauli Iron Pillar Inscription of king Candra in the 5th century C.E. It mentions a terrible battle fought in this country between Candra and his enemies who came united against him. The Mahākūṭa Pillar

Inscription of the 6th century C.E. tells us that the Cālukya king Kīrtivarman gained victory over Vaṅga, Aṅga and Magadha, i.e. the three Kalingas. Other epigraphic references to Vaṅga are found in the Tirumalai Rock Inscription of Rājendra Cola of the 11th century C.E. and the Goharwa Plate of Cedi Karṇadeva which mention it as Vaṅgāla. The Tirumalai Inscription distinguishes Vaṅga from both South Rāḍhā and North Rāḍhā. Besides, the Pithapuram plates of Pṛthivīseṇa (C.E. 1108), Copperplate Grant of Vaidyadeva of Kāmarūpa, the Edilpur Plate of Keśavasena, the Madanpada and Sāhitya Pariṣat Plates of Viśvarūpasena, Rampal Copper Plate of Srīcandra and other epigraphs mention Vaṅga in different contexts. In the 13th century the country was known as Baṅgāla and in Mohomedan times as Bāṅglā. According to Francis Buchanon the name Vaṅga was applied to only the eastern portion of the delta of the Ganges. Bhau Daji thinks that it was the country between the Brahmaputra and the Padmā. In the time of the *Mahābhārata* it was separated from Puṇḍra, Suhma and Tāmralipta. According to Xuanzang of 7th century C.E. Bengal was divided into 5 provinces. viz. Puṇḍra (North Bengal), Samataṭa (East Bengal), Karṇasuvarṇa (West Bengal), Tāmralipta (South Bengal) and Kāmarūpa (Assam). Pargiter holds that Vaṅga must have comprised the modern districts of Murshidabad, Nadia, and Jessore, parts of Rajshahi, Pabna and Faridpur. B. N. Mukherjee suggests that the original country of Vaṅga up to the Gupta period appears to have been distinct from Vaṅga of the Pāla-Sena period. Still later Vaṅga, Vaṅgāla and other related terms acquired a far wider connotation.

1) Samataṭa – The earliest epigraphic reference to Samataṭa is found in the Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta in the 4th century C.E. It has been mentioned along with other north-eastern frontier kingdoms of India which surrendered to the sovereign Gupta emperor. The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira of the 6th century C.E. is the first literary source which mentions it along with Puṇḍra, Tāmraliptaka, Vardhamāna and Vaṅga. Xuanzang in the 7th century C.E. seems to place Samo-ta-cha or Samataṭa to the south of Kāmarūpa. Yijing towards the end of the 7th century mentions a king named Rājabhaṭa who ruled over Samataṭa. This king is identical with Khaḍga king Rājarājabhaṭṭa of the Ashrafpur plate of the 7th century C.E. Rājarājabhaṭṭa had Karmānta as one of his capitals. Karmānta has been identified with Baḍakāmtā in Tripurā (Tippera). From the 7th century the Samataṭa country came to be represented in the copperplates of southeastern Bengal as a maṇḍala category administrative division and retained its locational potential in the context of local and extra local trade linkages in the early medieval period. The Candra dynasty appears to have brought under their rule the whole of Bengal including Samataṭa. Later the Varmans replaced the Candras in Samataṭa in the beginning of the 11th Century C.E. But they also gave place to the Senas towards the end of the same century. It appears from Xuanzang's accounts that at least some portion of mid-Bengal was included in Samataṭa. Again, it cannot be denied also that modern Tripura was a part of this kingdom from 7th to 12th century C.E. In the Baghaura image inscription of the 3rd regnal year of

Mahīpāla I (10th century), the words *campitalālokanāthasamataṭeariṣaṣṭāna* are found in a decorated manuscript of about 11th-12th century (Campitalā is a place in Tripurā). Mehar plate of Dāmodaradeva (1234 C.E.) etc. are documents which imply that the district of Tripurā was the headquarter of Samataṭa. The country was called Samataṭa because the rivers there had flat and level banks (taṭa) of equal height on both sides. This interesting information occurs in the accounts of Xuanzang.

2) Harikela –The accounts of Xuanzang and Yijing in the 7th century C.E. inform us that Harikela (O-li-ki-lo or A-li-ki-lo) was located at the easternmost part of the eastern country. The *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* written about the 8th century C.E. seems to suggest that Vaṅga, Samataṭa and Harikela were three independent but neighbouring kingdoms. It has been said that people of these kingdoms spoke the Asura dialect. Two manuscripts (*Rudrākṣamāhātmya* and *Rūpacintāmaṇikoṣa*) preserved in the Dacca University tell us that Śrīhaṭṭa and Harikela are one and the same. Rājaśekhara's *Karpūramañjarī* (9th century C.E.) seems to suggest that Harikeli was an eastern country. Ḍākārṇava distinguishes Harikela from Vaṅgāla, Ṭikkara (near Katwa, Burdwan), Khāḍi and Rāḍha. It seems from this work and the two manuscripts mentioned earlier that Harikela might have extended up to Śrīhaṭṭa. The Rampal copper plate of Śrīcandra describes Trailokyacandra, father of Śrīcandra, as the king of Harikela earlier who later became the king of Candradvīpa. Candradvīpa may be identified with modern Backergunj in Bangladesh. It seems that Harikela was

adjacent to Candradvīpa. Kāntideva's Chittagong inscription mentions Harikela as a *maṇḍala*.

The evidence of this inscription seems to indicate that Chittagong was included in Harikela at that time. All these evidences point to the fact that Harikela, though an adjacent country of Vaṅga and Samatāṭa, had been an independent kingdom from 7th-8th century to 10th-11th century C.E. till Candradvīpa was conquered by Trailokyacandra. From that time it was looked upon as a part of Vaṅga. Hemacandra in his *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* (12th century C.E.) mentions *vaṅgāstuharikeliyāḥ* implying thereby the identity of Vaṅga and Harikela. It was not very unexpected from a writer in Gujarat to make this statement in the 12th century. Moreover, his statement should be taken cautiously because he also equates Campā with Aṅga, but Campā was only a part of Aṅga, though the central part. Similarly Harikela was also a part of Vaṅga and the early centre of power of Trailokyacandra.

3) Paṭṭikerā- It was located in modern Kumilla in Bangladesh. Archaeological remains prove that it had been an affluent country already from 7th -8th century C.E. References to this kingdom occur in different literary and epigraphic sources dating from 11th century C.E. Burmese accounts speak of this kingdom in various contexts and seem to refer to the capital of this country. The evidences prove a close political relation between Paṭṭikerā and Brahmadeśa in the 11th-12th century. The city of Paṭṭikerā is distinctly mentioned in a 13th century inscription of Deva king Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva found in the Mainamati

hills. The names Pāṭikerā or Pāiṭkerā in the Middle Ages and Pāṭikārā or Pāiṭkārā in modern times are reminiscent of ancient kingdom of Paṭṭikerā. Niharranjan Roy thinks that probably the ancient city of Paṭṭikerā and the modern village of Mainamati in Mainamati hills of Pāiṭkārā pargana are one and the same. That this centre was included in the Paṭṭikerā kingdom from 11th to 13th century C.E. is proved by a manuscript of *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* (11th century) which has the words *paṭṭikerecundā varabhavanecundā*. It shows that the worship of Buddhist goddess Cundā was already popular before the 11th century in Paṭṭikerā.

4) Puṇḍravardhana - Initially Puṇḍra was the name of an ancient clan. These people lived in the northern part of Bengal and lent their name to the land inhabited by them. The Puṇḍras find their earliest mention in the Vedic literature, first in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and then in the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*. The *Manusamhitā* mentions Puṇḍra people, the *Mahābhārata* mentions Puṇḍra country, the Jaina *Kalpasūtra* mentions the Puṇḍravardhana branch of a certain sect of Jaina monks and the Mahasthan fragmentary inscription (c. 2nd century BCE.) mentions the city of the Puṇḍras (Puṇḍanagala, the capital of Puṇḍra; this city has been identified with present Mahāsthān in Bogra). These ancient evidences are corroborated by later findings also. Gradually it became so prosperous that it came to be called Puṇḍravardhana in the 5th-6th century C.E. and became an important province (*bhukti*) of the Gupta Empire. The Damodarpur, Dhanaidaha, Baigram and Paharpur copper plates

and the accounts of Xuanzang refer to it as Puṇḍravardhana. The copper plates show that the Puṇḍravardhanabhukti at that time extended at least over the districts of Bogra, Dinajpur and Rajshahi. Roughly the whole of north Bengal from Rajmahal-Gaṅgā-Bhāgīrathī-bank to Karatoya was under the Administrative control of Puṇḍravardhana. Xuanzang came to Puṇḍravardhana from Kajaṅgala and crossed Karatoya to go to Kāmarūpa. It proves that the country lying between Kajaṅgala and Karatoya was known by the name of Puṇḍravardhana. To the north of this land were the peaks of the Himalayas. The southern boundary changed from time to time. In later times the political boundary of this province kept on increasing. The Khalimpur plate of Dharmapāla (8th century C.E.) refers to Vyāghrataṭimaṇḍala as being a part of Puṇḍravardhana. Vyāghrataṭimaṇḍala has been equated by scholars with the present Baghri tract of land in the Murshidabad district adjoining Birbhum towards west. The Pashchimbhag copper plate of Śrīcandra in the 10th century C.E. informs us of the inclusion of Śrīhaṭṭa in the Samataṭamaṇḍala of Pauṇḍrabhukti. A grant issued by Laḍahacandra (11th century C.E.) says that Paṭṭikeraka was also situated in the Samataṭamaṇḍala of Pauṇḍrabhukti. The Manahali copperplate of Madanapāla refers to the province as Pauṇḍravardhanabhukti rather than Puṇḍravardhanabhukti in the middle of the 12th century and this is the first indication of further extension of the political-administrative boundary of the earlier Puṇḍravardhana. During the Sena period its southern limit further extended up to Khāḍiviṣaya (Khāḍi pargana, 24 parganas) in the west and up to the seashore of Dacca-Backergunj on the

other side. Even the Nāvyaṃaṇḍala and Vikramapura division were included in Pauṇḍravardhana. In fact, by the late 12th to early 13th century the entire landscape to the east of the Bhāgīrathī was included within the administrative orbit of the Pauṇḍravardhana.

5) Rāḍhā/Rāḍha – The famous country of Rāḍhā was also sometimes called Suhma (as by Nīlakaṇṭha, the commentator of the Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata*). It was situated on the western bank of the Bhāgīrathī. The earliest reference to Rāḍhā is found in the Jaina *Ācārāṅgasūtra* which describes this country as devoid of roads and social customs and its inhabitants as somehow cruel and rude. According to this text, it had two divisions, viz. Vajja (Vajrabhūmi) and Subbha (Suhmabhūmi) which according to B.C. Law may be taken to correspond to modern Midnapore. Jaina *Prajñāpanā* connects the Rāḍhas and Vaṅgas together and calls them Āryas. Koḍivarṣa (later Koṭivarṣa) was their capital. Koṭivarṣa lay in modern district of Dinajpur and according to the Damodarpur copper plates (5th-6th century C.E.) it was a district in the Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. The Pali Sinhalese Chronicles *Dīpavaṃśa* and *Mahāvaṃśa* mention a country named Lāḍa where the Bengal king Sīhavāhu founded the city of Sīhapura. Some scholars take this Lāḍa as Rāḍhā and Sīhapura as Singur in Hooghly, though others think that these correspond to Lāṭa country in Kathiawar and Sihor respectively. Epigraphical references to Rāḍha with its subdivisions are not rare. The Bhuvaneshwar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva mentions this country. The Tirumalai Rock Inscription of

RājendraCoḷa mentions Uttara-Rāḍha and Dakṣiṇa-Rāḍha as two distinct janapadas. Uttara-Rāḍha is mentioned in Belava copper plate of Bhojavarman, and the Naihati copper plate of Vallālasena describes it as belonging to Vardhamānabhukti. According to some scholars Uttara Rāḍha was that part of Bengal which includes a portion of the Murshidabad district. Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha or Takkaṇalāḍha was situated between Daṇḍabhukti and Vaṅga as becomes evident from the descriptions of Rājendra Coḷa's expeditions. It finds mention in various sources of different periods, like an inscription of Vākpati Muñja, the *Nyāyakandalī* of Śrīdhara, *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇamiśra (though it is mentioned there as included in Gauḍa), *Caṇḍīmaṅgala* of Mukundarāma and others. This division probably included present Howrah and major portions of Hooghly and Burdwan. B.C. Law holds that the province of Rāḍha seems to have comprised the modern districts of Hooghly, Howrah, Burdwan, Bankura and major portions of Midnapore.

6) Vardhamānabhukti –

Vardhamānabhukti (modern Burdwan) finds mention in different sources as one of the two administrative divisions of Rāḍha. The Mallasarul copper plate (6th century C.E.), the Irda copper plate of Nayapāladeva (10th century C.E.), the Naihati and Govindapur plates of Lakṣmaṇasena (11th-12th century C.E.) mention this province. According to the Irda inscription the boundary of Vardhamānabhukti extended up to Daṇḍabhukti. But the Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira seems to indicate that its

boundary in the south was not so far extended in the 5th-6th century C.E. Niharranjan Roy thinks that during the Pāla and Sena periods Vardhamānabhukti had four administrative divisions, viz. Daṇḍabhuktimaṇḍala (southern and south-western parts of modern Midnapore), Uttara-Rāḍha- and Dakṣiṇa-Rāḍha-maṇḍala and Paścimakhāṭikā (modern Howrah and western bank of the Gaṅgā). Though Dakṣiṇarāḍhamāṇḍala does not find specific mention in any inscription as one of the administrative divisions of Vardhamānabhukti, it can be easily deduced from available sources. The Irda copper plate grant which records the gift of a land in the Daṇḍabhuktimaṇḍala of Vardhamānabhukti was issued from the capital of Priyaṅgu, founded by king Rājyapāla. B.C. Law holds that the bhukti of Vardhamāna was in Uttara-Rāḍha and the capital of Priyaṅgu was in Dakṣiṇa-Rāḍha in Bengal. According to the Naihati copper plate Vardhamānabhukti seems to have extended at least as far as the western bank of the Gaṅgā near Kolkata.

7) Tāmralipta/Tāmralipti - The earliest reference so far to Tāmralipta occurs in the *Mahābhārata* in the context of Bhīma's conquest of the quarters. The Purāṇas frequently mention this country. The Vaṅgas, Karvaṭas and Suhmas were its neighbours. Jaina *Kalpasūtra* mentions it as the name of a branch of a certain sect of Jaina monks. In the *Jaina Prajñāpanā* Tāmalitti (Tāmralipti) is described as being under the possession of the Vaṅga people. The *Daśakumāracarita* refers to Dāmalipta as included in Suhma. Buddhist texts like the Jātakas often mention Tāmralipti as an important centre of

maritime trade. That it was an emporium of commerce is corroborated by the Periplus, Ptolemy's work, the accounts of Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing and the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. In Ptolemy's time the capital of Tāmralipta country was the port of Tāmralipta (Tamalites). However, the glory of the Tāmralipta port gradually began to diminish from 8th century onwards. Tamralipta has been identified with Tamluk in Midnapore, about 12 miles from the confluence of Rupnarayan and Hooghly. It is now located on the western bank of the Rupnarayan formed by the united stream of the Silai and Dalkisor in the district of Midnapore.

Early Urban Sites and Buddhist Archaeological Heritage of Bengal

In the light of nearly two centuries of research

BANGARH (SOUTH DINAJPUR)

Bangarh is an extensive cluster of historical settlements in the Gangarampur Police Station of present South Dinajpur district. The excavated segment of the site is located about 1 km north of Gangarampur proper on the eastern bank of river Punarbhaba within the jurisdiction of the village of Rajibpur.

The fortified part of the enormous site, according to the estimates of the excavator, is about 548.64x457.2m with an average height of 4.6m from the adjoining ground level forming a flattish tableland and 'surrounded by a ditch on three sides, viz., north, east and south.' A more precise size of 25 has readntly been proposed for the site (Chakrabarti 1995:217). Hamilton visited

the place in the early nineteenth century and gave an account of the place in its legendary association with the 'Ban Raja'. The fortified area, more popular as the Rajbari (i.e. 'king's palace') is 'surrounded by a high rampart of bricks, and Cunningham's description of the site in the late nineteenth century in this context deserves a thorough citation:

The citadel which the people called Devikot is about 2000ft. square, and is so filled with dense jungle that it is quite impossible to penetrate any distance inside except in the very hottest weather, when the grass and the underwater have been burnt and the tigers and leopards have sought shelter elsewhere (Cunningham 2000 rep.:95-6).

Later, K.N. Dikshit came across a female terracotta head of the 'Pāla' period from near a Siva temple at the site. If one considers the present spread of the settlement remains at the site, it is likely to incorporate an area of nearly 4 km starting from the excavated settlement complex of Rajbari on the south to the extensive structural remains at the Sibbari sector of Rajibpur on the north and from the settlement-cum-structural site of Kesabpur on the east to the structural mound of Ushagarh on the west.

The Asutosh Museum of the University of Calcutta undertook excavations on 6th March 1938 at the southernmost part of the fortified Rajbari mound of Bangarh and the site was dug for four consecutive seasons from 1937-38 to 1940-41. The excavator laid trenches over an area of 106.68x91.44m and depending on the nature of structural materials, the site

was divided by the excavator into two broad halves, viz. 'Block A' and 'Block B'. As gleaned from the published excavation report, the basic objectives of excavation at the site were two: (a) to establish the stratigraphic sequence of cultures at the site and (b) to comprehensively connect the structural and non-structural assemblages of the site in understanding its historical association with the well discussed political-Administrative centre called Koṭivarṣa/ Devikota.

In the light of artefacts recovered from different segments of the excavated area, the excavator suggests a five-fold cultural sequence for the site; each of the stratigraphic horizons was marked after the 'stratum' it represented. Thus, the site possesses a vertical sequence from stratum I to V, each signifying an occupation level.

Stratum I is termed as 'Muslim' period, owing to the discovery of large number of glazed/ enamelled pottery.

Stratum II, in terms of the material remains been taken to be coeval with the Pāla period, is the most significant and archaeologically rich cultural stage.

Stratum III - The cultural phase has been assigned to the Gupta period, though structural materials belonging to the previous period also continue.

Stratum IV - From the study of artefacts this period has been taken to belong to the early centuries of pre-Christian era, corresponding in terms of dynastic chronology to the Śuṅga period.

Stratum V - It is not possible to gauge from the excavator's statements if this

layer carried any specific stratigraphic identity in terms of dynastic chronology; it may be taken to represent the earliest phase of early historic occupation (3rd-2nd centuries BCE) at the site.

It is needless to reiterate that the present work concerns the assemblages of the four strata (II-V) of Bangarh.

The most detailed account included in the excavation report is that of its structural components, which form the most important body of sources from the site. Structures have been recovered from the four successive strata from I to IV among which those from stratum II, dated on empirical grounds between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, predominate. These elements, excavated from trenches 5, 7 and 8 have been dated to the 'late Hindu' or Pāla period and have been divided into two segments, viz. structures of Block A and those of Block B. It appears from the plans of structures that even within this single occupation layer, there were more than one structural phases. Most of the structures found in association with carved bricks indicate their religious association. The supposed *kuṇḍa* and the pillared hall, the only preserved structures at the site, are also indicative of a shrine area. Composite ground plan of the structures of this stratum fairly indicates the existence of a *pañcaratha* temple complex surrounded by walls and pavements in brick. However, the existence of a couple of granaries excavated in trench 8 and associated structural components hardly show any religious feature. It is quite probable that structural activities at the site were centred round religious constructions in the early centuries of

Pāla rule in the region, while at a still later stage, presumably around the eleventh-twelfth centuries, the religious focus shifted further north towards the extensive unexcavated mound at Sibbari and the Rajbari segments that gained prominence in terms of non-religious Administrative constructional affairs. Elsewhere it has been proved beyond any doubt that the excavated granary complex had a phenomenal administrative affiliation in being probably the 'royal granary of Devikota', having no apparent connection with the religious identity of the site. If the shift of structural activity from the southern to the northern segment of the site had anything to do with a transformation of religious ideology from more orthodox Buddhist practices to that of Saivite that will have to await excavations at the Sibbari complex.

Starting from stratum II to III, a large number of walls of varying dimensions have been excavated, though it is not possible to have a fair idea of their contextual identities. The structural evidences connected to the non-religious characters of the site in the early historic period include some fragmentary brick walls, a brick-built drain and a cess-pit without any outlet, recovered from stratum IV. The only settlement evidence from the lowest stratum of the site is terracotta ring well. No details of the fortification and its associated components are understandable from the published report, though it may be conveniently suggested that the site possessed a rampart dating back to as early as the second-first centuries BCE.

Among small artefacts, a large number of beads in terracotta and semi-precious stones, copper ornaments, a few gold pendants, a large number of iron objects like nails, chisels, awls, knives, daggers etc., moulded terracotta plaques, human and animal figures mostly carved as toys, designed terracotta medallions, inscribed and uninscribed seals and sealings, silver and copper punch-marked coins, uninscribed cast copper coins, besides characteristic early-early mediaeval pottery dominated by Black Slipped Ware (BSW hereinafter), a few sherds of NBPW, different varieties of red, buff, grey and black wares deserve specific mention.

JAGAJJIBANPUR/ TULABHITA (MALDA)

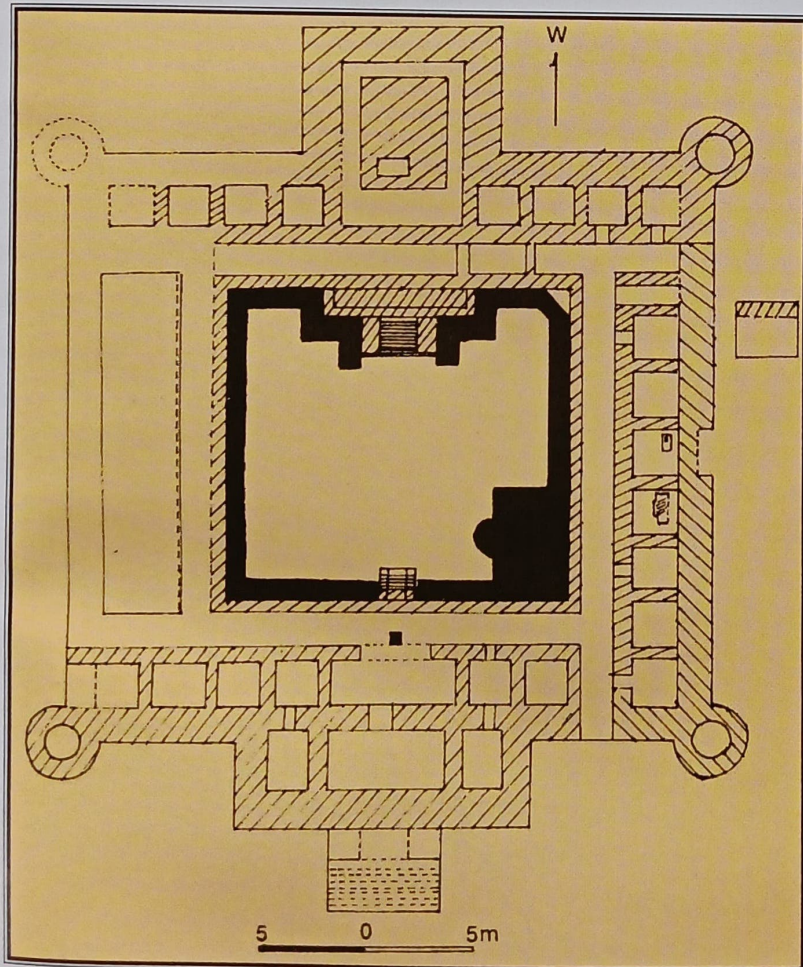
The excavated mound of Tulabhita (Plot No. 639) is located within the Jagajjibanpur mauza (a revenue unit current in West Bengal) of the Habibpur Police Station in the district of Malda, about 41km east of the Malda town. The river Punarbhaba flows to the east of Jagajjibanpur, while one of its local channels named Barendi encircles the excavated mound on three sides, viz. west, north and east.

Plate. Entrance of the excavated Buddhist monstic complex at Jagjibanpur, Malda district (courtesy Rajat Sanyal).



The name Jagajjibanpur has remained in the limelight of West Bengal archaeology since the last three decades or so, owing to a number of reasons. The excavated mound of Tulabhita (87x80x5.55m) came into public and academic notice on 13th March 1987 when a resident of Tulabhita named Jagadish Gayen came across an unusually large (52.5x37.5x0.75) copperplate charter outside his residential complex, with the effect that the site came to be known as the first and the only Pāla period monastic site in West Bengal. Further, this discovery initiated a new chapter in the early mediaeval political history of Bengal, nay eastern India, by introducing a hitherto unknown Pāla king named Mahendrapāla in the genealogy of early Pāla kings. In fact, Jagajjibanpur is the classic

Plate. Plan of the excavated monastery at Jagjibanpur (after Roy 2012).



example of an early mediaeval 'settlement locality' recorded in the inscription as the Nandadirgiudranga (i.e. 'Nandadirghi township/ collecorate'). The present site is constituted, besides Tulabhita, of a number of other mounds such as Akharidanga (72.29x28.28x6.5m), Nimdanga (40.86x28.28x2.5m), Maibhita (22.15x21.75x3m), and the most extensive structural mound called Lakshmidhibi (110x78.58, forming an almost circular tableland at the top measuring 35.50x32.80x2.65m). Although the excavated component of this large cluster is obviously religious in character, the other sites of the cluster being the non-religious segments of the settlement, once they are subjected to systematic digging, is quite a distinct possibility.

Encouraged by the discovery of the copperplate from a structural mound, the authorities of the State Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of the Government of West Bengal undertook excavations at the site of Tulabhita. The excavations have been conducted in two phases, firstly from 1992-93 to 1993-94 and again in a larger scale from 1995-96 to 1999-2000, under the general supervision of Sudhin De and Amal Roy respectively. The layout of the second phase of digging that revealed the plan of the monastery (Figure 4.2) included altogether 182 trenches (6x6m) of which 83 covering an area of 2988sqm were exposed during the excavations.

Tulabhita is an absolutely mono-culture site, having more than one structural phase though, chronologically ranging between CE ninth and the twelfth centuries. Soil profile characterized by eleven stratigraphic layers was revealed

during the earlier phase of excavation, while a more precise stratigraphy consisting of six pedological layers have been exposed during the final phase. Tulabhita represents a ninth century Buddhist monastic establishment built under the patronage of a front-ranking royal officer of the Pāla king.

The principal structure represents a Buddhist monastery square in outline, measuring 30x30m built of different sizes of bricks and tiles. The morphology of the structure, having an orthodox pattern of construction as revealed from a comparative account from other monastic sites of eastern India, is represented by a square complex with entrance from the east. The basic structural components of the monastery comprise an almost square courtyard (24.5x23.5m) at the centre, preadded towards east by separate sets of staircases, one at the main entrance and the other facing the courtyard itself, when viewed from east. The frontal staircase, larger in size, meets the inner structural complex at a rectangular hall flanked by two smaller rectangular chambers on either side to the north and south. This set is followed by another rectangular porch that opens in a covered veranda. A circular structure, resembling the one encountered at Nalanda monastery No. 8, was found at the north-eastern corner of the courtyard; this may best be explained as a brick-built well.

The 19 monastic cells run all round the square courtyard beyond the veranda and are located to the north, east and west of the courtyard that is located 1.75m below the level of the residential cells that vary in dimension from 4.90x3.00m to 3.40x3.30m. A separate toilet complex with brick-paved drain has been attested at the northern part of the monastery.

The sanctum meant for congregative veneration is situated, with triratha structural feature to the west, is traceable at the extreme western end of the complex. It is preadded by a third set of staircase at the open western end of the courtyard. The rectangular sanctum contains a small rectangular antechamber. One of the unique structural features of the Tulabhita monastery is the presence of four 'bastions or bastion-cum-cells' on the four cardinal corners. Three of these were exposed during excavation. The one to the northwest contained two niches in the internal side and this led the excavator to claim that these bastions were 'perhaps used by the monks as circular cells. Besides, the second functional attribute of these structures have been explained by the excavators in terms of their defensive character and hence the excavator suggests that it is a 'fort monastery'.

A large number of artefacts have been recovered from the site. Of special significance among them are the large numbers of inscribed and uninscribed seals some bearing the name (Nandadrighi vihāra) of the monastery. A large number of terracotta plaques carved with human, animal and composite figurative representations are also important. A miniature image of the Buddhist goddess Marici in metal is of utmost significance. Other artefacts include decorative bricks of different types, iron nails, terracotta lamps, fragmented stone sculptures and pottery. A thorough analysis of pottery from the site has revealed the use of a great variety of types in dull red, black, grey and buff along with Red-and-Black wares (Panja 1995-96:113-9).

RAJBARIDANGA (MURSHIDABAD)

The mound named Rajbaridanga forms the most prominent segment of the Kansona cluster of historical sites in the Berhampur Police Station of the same Subdivision in the district of Murshidabad on the west of the river Bhagirathi. It is located within the jurisdiction of the village of Chhiruti.

Rajbaridanga as the name of an archaeological site in West Bengal became well known not earlier than the 1960s, when it was first subjected to excavation by the University of Calcutta as part of its newly introduced post graduate programme in archaeology, under the direction of Sudhir Ranjan Das. However, the area encompassing the site and many of its neighbouring counterparts had a long history of antiquarian interest, owing to the identification of the debated *Karṇasuvarṇa*, the capital of the seventh century ruler Śaśaṅka. Many occidental and oriental scholars identified the place, owing to both its archaeological potential as well as the name Kansona (a direct corruption of *Karṇasuvarṇa*), with the early mediaeval city and an excavation at one of the mounds named *Rakshasidanga* had also been conducted in the 1920s (IV.2.24).

Thus, Rajbaridanga is a fragment of an enormous cluster of sites constituted by the mounds of *Rakshasidanga* (approximately 200x200x7.7m) located in the Pratappur Chandpara to the south of Rajbaridanga, *Thakurbaridanga* to the 'southeastern corner of Rajbaridanga, *Sanyasidanga* (height 7.6-8m) and *Beltaladanga* to the northeast of Rajbaridanga, *Bhimketalao* on the outskirts of Chandpara and the readily

noticed Nilkuthi (IV.2.6). Besides, modern habitation areas of many of the neighbouring villages like Araj, Madhupur, Rangamati, Char Bhawandi, Chak-Katalia, Char Dangapara, Char-Mahula, Chak-Chandpara, Pratapur and Sanskar are located atop ancient settlements. The whole area is culturally recognized under the name Kansona, which has no specific Administrative-geographic identity. It will be reasonable to presume that the entire Kansona cluster represents a typical early mediaeval 'settlement locality' (for an idea of the concept of settlement locality in early historic contexts, see Chattopadhyaya 1987: 727-32, 1989: 19-30). It is important to point out here that the excavator's estimate of the size of the mound of Rajbaridanga is 503,500 sq ft (equivalent to 153466.8 sq m) is definitely the result of a misprint. In our estimate the area covered by this mound should be approximately 18-20ha. Excavations at the site were conducted for altogether nine seasons between 1961-62 and 1980-81 with a few gaps. Besides identification of the place with ancient *Karṇasuvarṇa*, the major objective, reconstruction of the cultural sequence of the site was also a prime aim of the excavations. Layout for altogether 525 trenches was taken up and 113 were exposed in the north-eastern corner (Figure 4.3).

On the basis of the 'datable finds' like the inscribed seals, the excavator proposes the following sequence of cultures at the site:

Period I: 'Characterized by the presence of plain and crude pottery and absence of inscribed seals', this period has been

dated between the second and the fifth centuries.

Period II: This culture period 'distinguished by inscribed seals and other antiquities', has been taken as the period of prosperity at the site and has been dated between the fifth-sixth and the tenth-eleventh century.

Period III: This phase is 'marked by the absence of seals' and has been dated between the ninth and the twelfth centuries.

Quite apparently, the huge quantity of inscribed seals, along with the huge variety in the morphometric characters of bricks, has been taken as the settlement marker of the site. The results of excavations at Rajbaridanga in the first season was published as a monograph in 1968 containing two 'parts' dealing with the excavated structures and the large number of seals respectively and in all subsequent studies on the site, this has been cited as the only primary 'source'. It is noteworthy, however, that the excavator continued to publish his observations on the character of the site in a number of publications that are hardly in archaeological studies on Karnasuvārṇa. Furthermore, the annual official reports published in the IAR also provide clues, as we shall attempt to elucidate, that should not be overlooked. A comparative review of the IAR reports and the published excavation report (Das 1968) will clearly enable one to understand that the latter contained materials excavated at least up to the season of 1963-64 and not only those of the first season as the excavator humbly claims.



An enormous variety with many phases of constructional activities characterizes the site, as the published report suggests.

The excavation revealed prolific building activities at the site. Structural remains having uniform patterns and sequences were uncovered in all trenches. There are, however, certain differences in constructions. The earlier structures were distinguished by the use of well-burnt and large-sized bricks and simple clay as mortar. But the uppermost structures disclosed the use of bricks of lesser sizes including some hunted bricks from the earlier structures and the mortar comprised clay with cow-dung.

Subsequently, a thorough correlation between the structural and the artefactual components at the site was drawn, in combination with detailed observation

Plate. Excavated structural complex at Rajbaridanga in Karnasuvārṇa, Murshidabad district (courtesy Rajat Sanyal).

on datable objects, nature of structural elements and size of bricks in various structural-cultural phases. Depending on the data recovered and correlations drawn, the excavator suggests a three-fold cultural chronology, considering the trenches A4 and D1 as 'type-trenches'. In the light of data unearthed in the eight subsequent seasons, the excavator proposes a more composite correlative account of structural and cultural components, considering the notice of a sixth structural phase, excavated between 1964-65 and 1971-72. The three cultural stages have been interconnected with the six cultural periods of which the first two coincide with period I, the third and the fourth with period II and the last two with period III.

The structural elements discovered at the site consisted of mainly a pañcāyatana temple with a number of subsidiary constructions, at least till the publication of the report. However, a large number of structural components were excavated in the subsequent seasons. For example, a massive brick structure forming part possibly of an associated rammed pathway with two robust parallel walls excavated in 1964-65 (Figure 4.4) deserve special mention. At the same time, it is difficult to have a fair picture of the structural components excavated in the later seasons at the site, particularly in the absence of the published ground plans of all the structural materials. Altogether four C14 dates are available from Rajbaridanga. These are (i) 1710 $\pm$ 95 BP corresponding to CE 240 (sampled from B5 /1.8/3.30m), (ii) 1565 $\pm$ 95 BP=CE385 (sampled from B5 /1.8/3.10m), (iii) 1540 $\pm$ 95 BP=CE 410

(sampled from B3 /1.12A/3.50m) and (iv) 1200 $\pm$ 80 BP=CE 750 (sampled from burnt grains from a granary at C3 and D3). These dates, if calibrated, are likely to reflect a date range between the fourth and the eighth century (Figure 4.5). The richest repertoire of artefact from Rajbaridanga is composed of numerous inscribed and /or designed seals and seal blanks. Besides the well-known seals carrying the name of the Vihāra, a number of specimens bearing personal names, Buddhist creed and a specimen bearing an inscription in Roman script and one containing inscription in Pallava character are of special significance.

The burnt granary from C3 at the site overlain by a thick deposit of ash led the excavators to argue that the area around the granary caught fire somewhere around the late seventh or early eighth century. A careful study of the section preserved in the Department of Archaeology, Calcutta University has added a very curious set of information in this regard. The ash layer discovered at C3 has been found at different stratigraphic levels, as clear from many other trends (c.f. Figure 4.5). Does it indicate that not only the small area with the granary, but also a considerable part of the core monastic establishment suffered from a conflagration?

Among the most significant artefacts discovered during excavations, mention should be specifically made of six stucco heads (of the Buddha?) dated in the sixth-seventh centuries. A metal figure representing the Buddhist Dharmacakra, a miniature bronze head and an image of Gaṇeśa comprise the metal craftsmanship of the site at the pre-Pāla period. A

large number of terracotta and semi-precious beads and iron objects and some fragmentary human skeletal remains are also noteworthy.

Although potteries were thoroughly and carefully described (Appendix 2), in the complete absence of figurative reproductions, it is difficult to have a clear idea of the nature of ceramic assemblages of different cultural periods at the site. A comprehensive study of the potteries from the different sites of the settlement complex at Karṇasuvarṇa, the chronology of which expand from CE second-third to at least twelfth-thirteenth centuries, might be very rewarding in determining changes in the functional characters of the settlement.

The summary results of excavation at the site by the excavator, published after the initial phase of excavation, it may be noted, remains the index in understanding the nature of settlement at the site in the early-early mediaeval periods.

(i) That the site of Rajbaridanga appears to have been in successive occupations from c. second-third century C.E. to twelfth-thirteenth century C.E.

(ii) That three distinct cultural periods could be determined, the seal producing level and the levels preadding and succeeding it.

(iii) That the first phase of occupation at the site was destroyed by an inundation which left behind silt deposition covering the entire excavated area.



(iv)

That

the excavation

at

Rajbaridanga revealed prolific building activities and that the structural remains may be ascribed to five distinct Phases.

Plate. Excavated monastic sealing from Rajbaridanga (courtesy Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta).

(v) That, though no complete plan of building complex could be obtained, the nature and character of structural remains speak of the Buddhist monastic establishments, more particularly those belonging to Phase III comprising a platform, stūpa-basements, staircase, pavement etc.

(vi) That the finds recovered during excavations, comprising stucco heads, copper cakra, etc., attest to the existence of the Buddhist establishments.

(vii) That seals and sealings discussed in Part II firmly establish the presence of the Buddhist monastery buildings and shrines.

(viii) That on the basis of the contents of the seals and sealings ascribed to culture Period II and correlated with Phase III structures, the exposed Buddhist monastic establishments are to be identified with the illustrious Raktrmrttikā-samghārāma described by Xuanzang in the seventh century C.E. as standing in the suburb of the capital city of Kaṇṇasuvārṇa, the grand metropolis of Saśāṅka, the first sovereign overlord of Bengal.

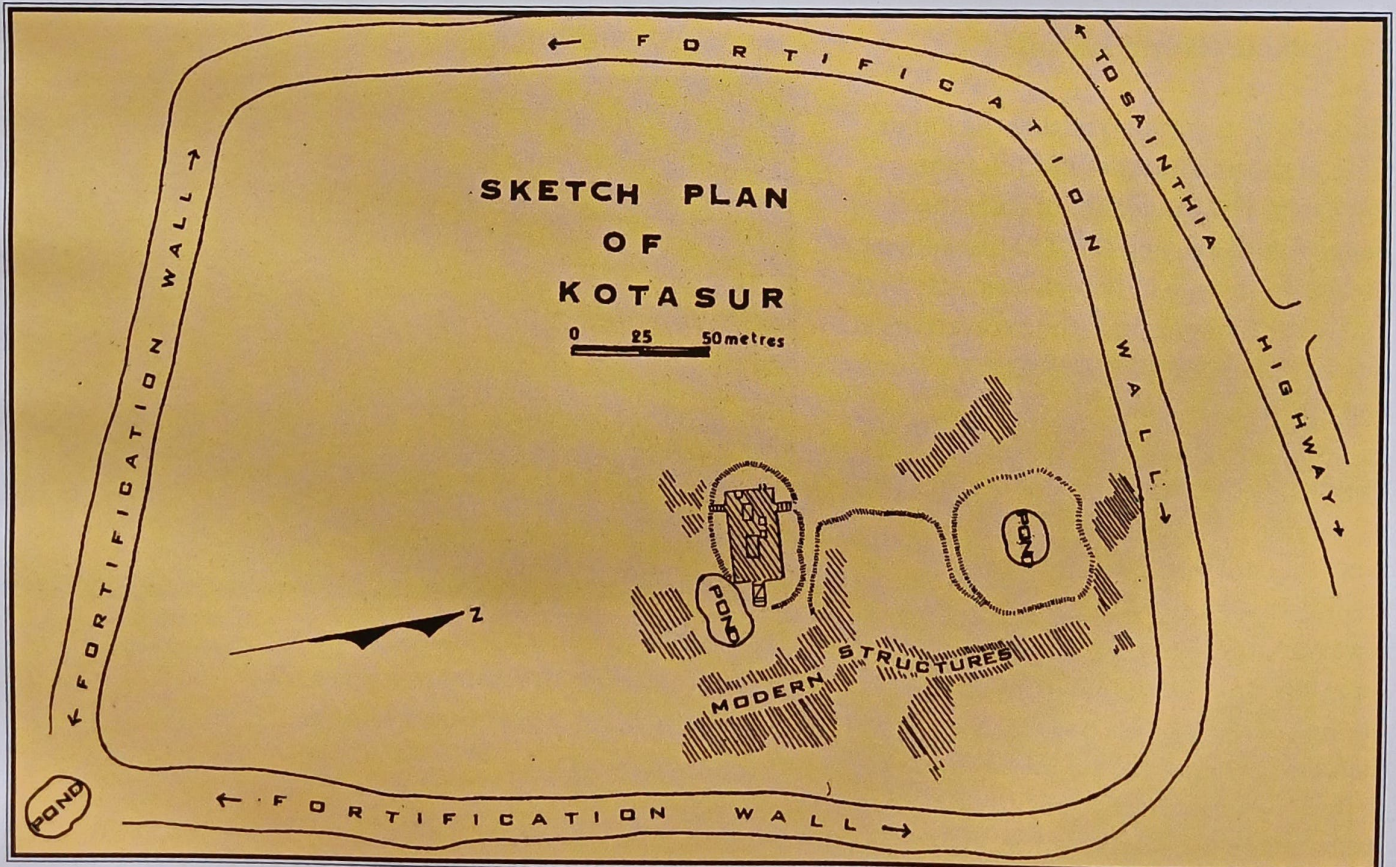
(ix) That, on the testimony of Xuanzang's accounts, it has now become possible to fix the hitherto undetermined present geographical location of Kaṇṇasuvārṇa. On the strength of seal inscriptions CE other records, it may be affirmed that the famous capital city of Kaṇṇasuvārṇa stood in the neighbourhood of the

excavated site of Rājbaridāṅgā. Thus, on circumstantial evidences the present location of Kaṇṇasuvārṇa stands confirmed.

Kotasur (Birbhum)

The site of Kotasur is located in the Birbhum district, near the Mayurakshi River. The village stands on a flat mound, with the largest mound (about 70x70x5m) situated in the centre of Contai, where a medieval Siva temple is found. The site was previously reported as a fortified early historic complex before being excavated by Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, in the 1980s under N.C. Ghosh. This site's periods range from 2nd-3rd century BCE to the Pāla-Sena era.

Plate. Sketch plan of the fortified site of Kotasur (after Chakrabarti, Nag and Chakrabarti 1988).



Nanoor (Birbhum)

This archaeological site is located in the Nanoor Police Station, on the Koena River in the Kopai-Mayurakshi interfluvies. Excavations at this place are conducted in two phases, in 1945-46 by the Asutosh Museum (Calcutta University) and in 1967-68 by the ASI. Chronological sequence of the findings at this site is likely between the 3rd- 4th centuries CE and the 15th-16th centuries with a gap after early medieval times.

Bahiri (Birbhum)

Bahiri's location is 7 km east of Bolpur, near the Ajay river. Under the supervision of Dilip K. Chakrabarti several trenches were excavated at this site. Archaeological findings at this locale span from 1000(+) BCE to 6th century CE.

Mangalkote (Bardhaman)

Mangalkote is situated beside the Kanur river at the northeast of Bardhaman township. The University of Calcutta, under Amita Ray and R.K. Chattopadhyay, excavated the site in two phases. Artefacts and other findings from the excavations at this site range from Chalcolithic to Pāla-Sena periods.

Pandurajar Dhibi (Bardhaman)

A protohistoric site with evidence spanning from 1600 BCE to CE 1000. Excavations revealed artefacts like bone tools, iron implements, and terracotta items. The site's periods range from pre-metallic protohistoric (1600-1400 BCE) to the Pala-Sena period (CE 800-1000). Pakhanna (Bankura): This site, linked

to the Puskarana of the Susunia rock inscription, shows occupation from the Chalcolithic to early medieval periods. Excavations yielded pottery, terracotta figures, and copper coins. The site has five cultural periods, including early historic and early medieval.

Dihar (Bankura)

Excavations uncovered Chalcolithic and early historic layers, with notable findings including Sunga and Kushana pottery, semi-precious stone beads, and copper coins. The site also featured early historic structures like a rectangular floor with pottery clusters.

Chandraketugarh (North 24-Parganas)

A major early historic site, covering 6-8 sq km, with artifacts spanning from the Pre-Maurya period to the Pala-Candra-Sena period (c. 600 BCE - CE 1250).

Plate. Early historic fortification at Chandraketugarh (courtesy Rajat Sanyal)



Excavations revealed terracotta plaques, copper coins, and structural remains such as mud floors and a post-Gupta temple.

(Fortification at Chandraketugarh)



Plate. Early historic Black Polished Ware from Chandraketugarh (courtesy private collection).



Plate. Early historic Black Polished Ware from Chandraketugarh (courtesy private collection).

Plate. NBPW of c. 3rd century BCE from Pokhanna, Bankura (courtesy of Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta).



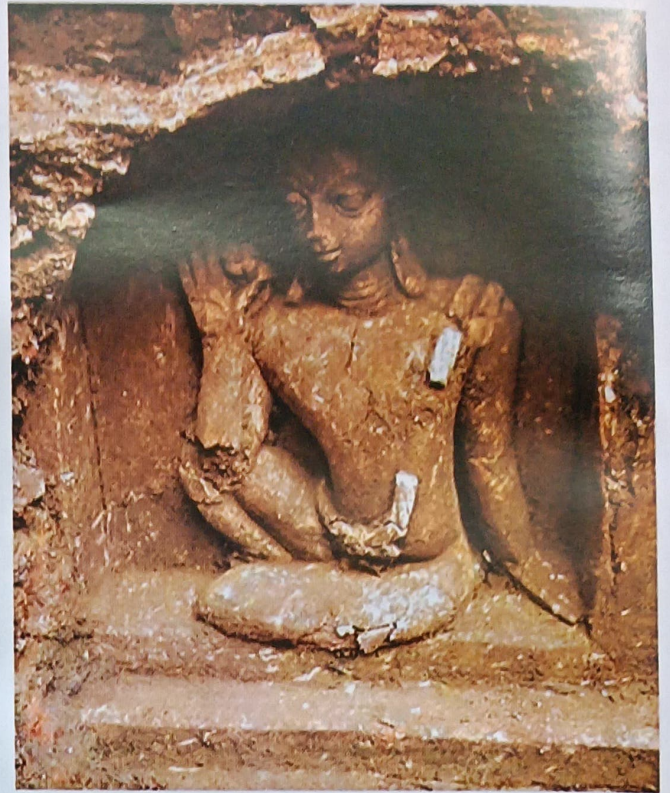


Plate. Excavated stucco figures from the Buddhist monastic site at Moghalmari (courtesy Rajat Sanyal).



Plate. Early terracotta head from Tilpi, South 24-Parganas, datable to the fifth century (courtesy State Archaeological Museum, Kolkata).

Tamluk (East Medinipur)

An ancient port town known as Tāmralipta, with evidence of settlement from the Neolithic to the medieval period. Excavations revealed NBPW, BSW, and terracotta items, as well as Gupta-era art like a female terracotta figure. These sites provide significant insights into the cultural evolution and historical importance of West Bengal from prehistoric to early medieval times.

In conclusion we can say that the above discussion on the archaeological explorations at various geographical locations of the present day Bengal clearly establish the ancestry of the Bengali people. The objective of this chapter has been to prove the existence of the linguistic-community called Bengali in the present day Bengal from pre-historic times. The various janapadas unearthed in archaeological explorations

unquestionably testify to that. As the existence of the linguistic –community called Bengali is established from archaeological, linguistic, textual and historical resources, the existence of the Bengali language (proto-Bengali in the process of development) used by that community is clearly established. In the next chapters, we would look into the trade and other material cultures of the Bengali people from the beginning of the Christian era and even before that prove the pre-eminence of the Bengali people as a trading community- a historical fact that further testifies the existence of rich linguistic-material culture of the people.

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बोदेबेषेनवद्युजागविः। तनूकद्वौपिप्रमतिश्चकारवेत्वंकल्याण
 मग्नेप्रमतिस्त्वंपितासिनस्त्वंवयस्त्वंतवजामयोवयां। संत्वारयः
 सुवीर्यंतिव्रतपामदाय ॥३३॥ त्वामग्नेप्रथममायुमायवेदेवा
 श्रुतिं। इहामकृष्वन्मनुषस्यशासनीपितुर्यत्पुत्रामर्मकस्यजाय
 पायुर्भिर्मघोनोरक्षतन्वश्चवंद्य। गतातोकेस्युतनयुगवामस्य
 ते। त्वमग्नेयज्यवेपायुरंतरोनिषंगायचतुरक्षइध्यसे। योरान
 रेश्चिन्मंत्रमनसावनोषिता। त्वमग्नेउरुशंसायवाघतेस्याह्य
 नू। आध्रस्यचित्प्रमतिरुच्यसेपिताप्रपाकंशास्सिप्रदिशोविदु

Chapter Four

सुविश्वमेविषेत्
तेनःसंसहस्रिणः
कृण्वन्तदुषस्यवि
त्वंनोअग्नेनवदेव
मेषंरक्षमाणस्तव
रावकायधायसेकी
म्हाःपरमंवनोषित
ःत्वमग्नेप्रयतदक्षि

35

Bengal in Ancient Indian Literary Heritage and Foreign Accounts

Amitava Das

Somnath Chakraborty

The antiquity of Bengal as a geographical region or people therein is well evidenced from the records found in texts of Vedic, Sanskrit, Pali literature or inscriptions found in various parts of greater India. We may, at first, have a glance of the territorial divisions of Bengal that are spoken of time and again and thus prove the ancientness of the region.

The Places

Puṇḍravardhana

The name Puṇḍra, based on a tribe, gradually developed into a territorial unit, known as the Puṇḍranagara. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* Puṇḍras are mentioned first time as separate tribe alongside Andhras, Śabaras, Pulindas and Mutibas. The identification of this place with Mahasthan, located on the right bank of the river Karatoya in the Bogra district of present day Bangladesh, is now certain with the discovery of the Mahasthan Brāhmī inscription, palaeographically assigned to 3rd century BCE. The region bounded by the Padma in the south, Ganges in the west and either the Karatoya or the Jamuna in the east was known as Puṇḍra, Puṇḍravardhana, comprising the modern areas of Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna in Bangladesh, Dinajpur (both of India and Bangladesh) and ancient Varendra. According to the Damodarpur copper plate inscription of the time of Budhagupta (c 476-94 CE) the northern limit of Puṇḍravardhana was the Himalayas (*himavac chikhara*). In the Gupta period Puṇḍravardhana or Puṇḍravardhana became an important bhukti or territorial division. Epigraphic materials of the Gupta period from North Bengal clearly show that Puṇḍravardhana bhukti was divided into several

viśayas or districts, which were again subdivided into *vīthis* and *maṇḍalas*. The administrative and territorial jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana expanded in the Pāla period. In the Pāla, Candra and Sena periods Puṇḍravardhana included areas beyond the geographical boundaries of North Bengal.

Vaṅga

Vaṅga, as name of people and region referred to in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* for the first time. In the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* the Vaṅgas are mentioned in a list of people who lived in regions beyond the zone of Aryan civilization. Though there are so many textual references available that mentioned Vaṅga, but they do not provide a transparent idea about the geographical boundaries of this region. The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki mentions the Vaṅgas to be in league with Ayodhyā. Kālidāsa in *Raghuvamśa* places the Vaṅga kings amidst the streams of the Ganges. We may quote RC Majumdar here.

“In some Jaina texts the region to the west of the Bhāgīrathī, such as Tamluk, is included in Vaṅga, but the two are often referred to as distinct. Vaṅga proper was generally restricted to the eastern part of the Gangetic delta, though a part of it was distinguished as far back

as sixth century AD as Upavaṅga, which, according to the *Digvijayaprakāśa* (c. 1600 AD), included Jessore. On the other hand, according to some writers, Vaṅga included some territory to the east of the Brahmaputra, such as Sylhet.¹

Suhma

Suhma, a territorial unit of ancient Bengal is generally believed to be located in southwest Bengal. The earliest reference to Suhma as a territory is found in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*. The people of Suhma are mentioned in the *Mahābhārta* of Vyāsa in connection with the conquests of Karṇa and Bhīma and they are distinguished from the people of Tāmralipta/Dāmalīpta, though according to the mention in the *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin Suhma and Tāmralipta were not separate communities, and the latter is a part of the former. The *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa locates the territory of Suhmas between the Bhagirathi and the Kansai, stretching southwards as far as the sea. Following the textual reference in Jaina text *Ācārāṅgasūtra* scholars suggest that Vajjabhumi and Subbabhumi were the component parts of Rāḍha. Subbabhumi is generally taken to be a corruption of Suhma or Suhmabhūmi. Therefore, it can be assumed that only a part of Rāḍha was referred to by the geographical term Suhma. Nīlakaṇṭha, the commentator of the *Mahābhārata*, mentioned Suhma and Rāḍha as one and the same. Dhoyi's *Pavanadūta* mentions that the Suhma territory was located along the valley of the Bhagirathi. Niharranjan Ray postulates the existence of another settlement, the Brahma or Brahmottara, alongside the Suhma territory. This is further confirmed by a passage in the

Kāvyamīmāṃsā of Rājaśekhara which mentions Aṅga, Vaṅga, Suhma, Brahma, Puṇḍra etc. as large settlements of the east. Thus it can be assumed that Brahma was the name of a large settlement in eastern India somewhere in the neighbourhood of Suhma. Now the expression *suhma-brahmottara* should perhaps be taken to mean Suhma with Brahma (lying) to its north. It is generally accepted that Suhma denoted if not the entire territory of the western part of Bengal, but most probably its southern part. Dāmalīpta (i.e. Tāmralipta), which can be seen with the archaeological remains scattered over the localities in and around modern Tamluk in the district of Medinipur in West Bengal, was possibly in the Suhma territory along the coastal region.

Tāmralipta/Tāmralipti

Earliest reference to Tāmralipta is found in the *Mahābhārata* of Vyāsa. In the *Sabhāparvan* of the text it is distinguished not only from territories known to have been situated in Northern, Eastern and Central Bengal, but also from Suhma. In later stages Tāmralipti is represented as having formed a part of Vaṅga in the time of Jaina *Prajñāpanā*, and of Suhma in the days of Daṇḍin, author of the *Daśakumāracarita*. The core of the territory lay in the modern day Medinipur district and its capital has been identified with Tamalites of Ptolemy, the modern Tamluk. According to Xuanzang this region lays over 900 li, i.e. about 150 miles, from Samataṭa and was about 1400 li (about 233 miles) in circuit. "The land was low and moist", forming a bay where land and water communication met.²

¹ Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, p. 8.

² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 14.

Gauḍa

The precise location of the ancient city of Gauḍa as well as of the kingdom which bore its name is not known. Pāṇini in his *Aṣṭādhyayī* mentioned a city named Gauḍa in the rule 6.2.11³, though the location is not indicated. In *Bṛhatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira the territory of Gauḍa is distinguished from that of Pauṇḍra, Tāmraliptaka and Vardhamāna, as well as from Vaṅga and Samataṭa⁴. A more definite geographical boundary of Gauḍa is found in some literary and epigraphic records. According to the Haraha inscription of Maukhari king Īśānavarman (6th century CE), Gauḍas were forced to seek refuge in the sea, which in turn indicates Gauḍas' residence to be in the coastal area. This further is supported from the Gurgi inscription of Prabodhaśiva, that says, "the lord of Gauḍa lies in the watery fort of the sea"⁵. The description of *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* regarding the location of Gauḍa as a territory lying to the north of Burdwan and south of the Padma river is corroborated by the archaeological remains of Śaśāṅka's capital at Karṇasuvarṇa, discovered from Rajbaridanga, six miles southwest of Berhampur in the district of Murshidabad. Xuanzang speaks of Śaśāṅka as the king of Karṇasuvarṇa. Apparently the same ruler is called the lord of Gauḍa in the *Harṣacarita* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa. The *Kathasaritsāgara*, ascribed to Somadeva, refers to the city of Vardhamāna in Gauḍa. In the *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇamiśra (11th or 12th century CE) it is said that Rāḍha and Bhūriśreṣṭhika (identified with Bhursut on the banks of Damodar

³ *ariṣṭagaḍapūrve ca*

⁴ For the text see Sastri, *Brihat Samhita*, p.

161.

⁵ Cf. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXII, p. 135.

in the Hooghly-Howrah districts) are included in Gauḍa-rāṣṭra, though the Managoli inscription of Yādava king Jaitugi I distinguishes Lāḷa (Rāḍha) from Gauḷa (Gauḍa).⁶ In Jaina literature of 13th-14th centuries CE Gauḍa included Lakṣmṇāvatī. If Yaśodhara, author of *Jayamaṅgalā* commentary on Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, is to be believed, Gauḍa extended southward as far as Kāliṅga. According to *Śaktisaṅgamatantra*, a late mediaeval work, the territory of Gauḍa was extended from Vaṅga to Bhuvaneśa, i.e. modern Odisha. Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅginī*, a work of 12th century CE, uses the term Pañcagaḍa which in some texts is taken to embrace, besides Gauḍa proper, the countries known as Sārasvata, Kānyakubja, Mithilā and Utkala.⁷ In early mediaeval period the term Gauḍa came to be applied to the city of Lakṣmṇāvatī in the Malda district.

Samataṭa

The Allahabad pillar inscription mentioned Samataṭa as one of the frontier states of Samudragupta's empire. But its exact limit in the Gupta era is unknown till date. In the *Bṛhatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira this place is distinguished from Vaṅga. Xuanzang in his travelogue described it as a low and moist country on the seaside that lay to the south of Kāmarūpa. In Yijing's (7th century CE) travelogue we found mention of Rājabhaṭa's rule over Samataṭa. Now this Rājabhaṭa is identified with Rājarājabhaṭa of the Khadga dynasty of East Bengal, referred to in the Ashrafpur copper plate inscriptions.⁸ These grants were issued from the royal camp of Karmāntavāsaka,

⁶ Fleet, "Inscriptions at Managoli", *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. V, p. 29 (*jitalāḷam jitagauḷam...*).

⁷ Cf. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 7.

⁸ Cf. Laskar, "Ashrafpur Copper-plate Grants".

identified with Barkamta in the Tippera district of Bangladesh.⁹ Thus we understand that Karmāntavāsaka was a part of Samataṭa.

Rāḍha

It is one of the distinct geographical units of ancient Bengal, that is referred to for the first time in the Jaina chronicle *Ācārāṅgasūtra* (5th century BCE-1st century BCE). The said text mentioned the place as Lāḍha. Two Buddhist chronicles namely *Dīpavaṃśa* (4th century CE)¹⁰ and *Mahāvāṃśa* (5th century CE)¹¹ mentioned Laḷa, identified as Rāḍha. Epigraphic and literary records of 9th-10th century CE mentioned two divisions of Rāḍha, namely Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha and Uttara Rāḍha, roughly correspond to Vajjabhumi and Subbabhumi respectively of earlier times. The Tirumalai rock inscription Rājendra Cola (11th century CE) clearly mentions Takkaṇālāḍa (Dakṣiṇa or South Rāḍha) and Uttiralāḍa (Uttara or North Rāḍha).¹² This inscription distinguishes Takkaṇālāḍa from Daṇḍabhukti and Vaṅgādeśa and North Rāḍha. In later stages the Gaonri plates of Vākpati Muṇja (10th century CE), Śrīdhara's *Nyāyakandali*, Kṛṣṇamiśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*, Mukundarāma's *Caṇḍīmaṅgala* talk about Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha. The Belava copper plate inscription of Bhojavarman refers to the village of Siddhala (identified with Siddhalagram in modern Birbhum of West Bengal) in Uttara Rāḍha as the birthplace of Bhavadevabhaṭṭa. The Naihati copperplate grant of Vallālasena

mentioned a village called Vāllahiṭṭhā (identified with Balutiya on the northern fringe of Burdwan of West Bengal) in Uttararāḍhamāṇḍala. As per the epigraphic and literary records Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha included different settlements of modern Howrah, Hooghly and Burdwan, or considerable portions of West Bengal lying between the rivers Ajay and Damodar. The river Ajay is usually regarded as constituting the boundary between north and south Rāḍha. Assumably the northern Rāḍha comprised the western parts of Murshidabad, the entire district of Birbhum, some parts of the Santal Parganas, and the Katwa subdivision of the Burdwan district.

Gangaridai

In the accounts of the Greek authors the term Gangaridai and its variants, viz. Gangaridae, Gandaridai, Gandaritis, Gangaridum and Gangaridus are found. We may quote Sircar regarding the derivation of the name Gangaridai. The people called Gangaridae are usually located in Bengal. They therefore represented one of the various tribal elements constituting the so-called Prācyā people. The separate mention of the Gangaridae and the Prasii (who apparently included in the Gangaridae) indicates the importance of the former among different elements of the Prācyā people under the Nandas and Mauryas (who may have belongs to that tribe) in the fourth and third centuries B.C. The name Gangaridae is sometimes taken as a Greek corruption of Sanskrit Gaṅgā-rāṣṭra, Gaṅgā-rāḍha or Gaṅgā-hṛdaya. The unsoundness of these suggestions is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the word Gangaridae in the plural is derives from the base Gange or Ganges

9 Bhattachali, "Some Image Inscriptions", p.

351.

10 For time of *Dīpavaṃśa* see Malalasekera, *Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, p. 131.

11 For *Mahāvāṃśa*'s time loc. cit

12 For the text Hultzsch, "Tirumalai Rock Inscription", p. 232.

[the letter r in the plural form is an augment] as Achaemenidae (the Achemenians) from Achaemenes and Sasanidae (the Sasanians) from Sasan. The name of the people is therefore Gange or Ganges and not Gangaridae which simply means the Ganges or Gangian people. That the correct form of the name of this people was Ganges is certain since, as will be shown below, it is found in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* as the name of its habitat. The particular area of Bengal that was inhabited by the Gangaridae (Ganges people or Gangians) is indicated not only by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (circa 80 A.D.) but very definitely also by the *Geography of Ptolemy* (circa 140 A.D.).¹³

According to Quintus Curtius Rufus, Roman historian probably from 1st century CE, the river Ganges on its bank was inhabited by two people, namely the Gangaridai and Prasii.¹⁴ For further study we may quote Majumdar here.

“The Greek and Latin writers refer to two nations, the Prasii (Prasioi) and Gangaridai (Var. Gandaridai) who ruled over nearly the whole of North India from the river Beas in the Punjab to the eastern frontier of India beyond the Ganges. The classical writers, however, did not possess a very accurate idea of the exact location of the Gangaridai and their relationship with the Prasioi who had their capital at Pāṭaliputra. Diodorus for example says in one passage that the “Ganges which is 30 stades broad, flows from north to south forming the boundary towards the east of the tribe of the Gangaridai.” This would imply that the Gangaridai were the inhabitants of Rāḍha. But according to other writers, such as Curtius, Plutarch and Solinus, the two nations, the Gangaridai and the Prasii, dwelt on the further bank of the Ganges, i.e. the eastern bank. Diodorus himself says that the region where the Gandaridai lived “is separated from further India by the greatest

¹³ Sircar, *Studies in the Geography*, pp. 173-174.

¹⁴ McCrindle, *Invasion of India*, p. 221.

river in these parts for it has a breadth of 30 stadia.” These different statements have been reconciled by supposing that by the Ganges the classical writers meant the easternmost branch of the Ganges (the Padmā) rather than the westernmost (Bhāgīrathī or Hooghly). But the specific statement in the first passage that the river runs from north to south exactly describes the course of the second rather than the first. Evidently, the classical writers had a vague notion of the geography of this region and we shall not be justified in concluding from their varying descriptions that the Gangaridai lived in Rāḍha. There is, however, no doubt that Bengal was the homeland of the Gangaridai.¹⁵

Pliny in his *Natural History* mentioned that “the last nation situate on the banks of the Ganges is that of the Gangarides Calingae...”¹⁶ Ptolemy, who mentions the five mouths of the Ganges tells further that Gangaridai with the following city Gange occupies all the five mouths of Ganges. In the text of *Periplus Maris Erythraei* it is recorded that one could find the country of the Ganges while sailing eastwards in the Bay of Bengal. It is mentioned further in the text that on the bank of the river Ganges there is a market-town, bearing the same name of the river. Apparently the town of Ganges in the *Periplus* indicates Gangaridai of other classical accounts.

It appears that the Gangetic delta immediately before and after the beginning of the current era was once known as the ‘heart of the Ganges’ (i.e. Gaṅgāhṛdaya) or the country of Ganges. Though this particular term has not been preserved in any of extant Indian textual source, Gaṅgā country as well as Gaṅgāhṛdaya implies its Indian origin.

¹⁵ Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

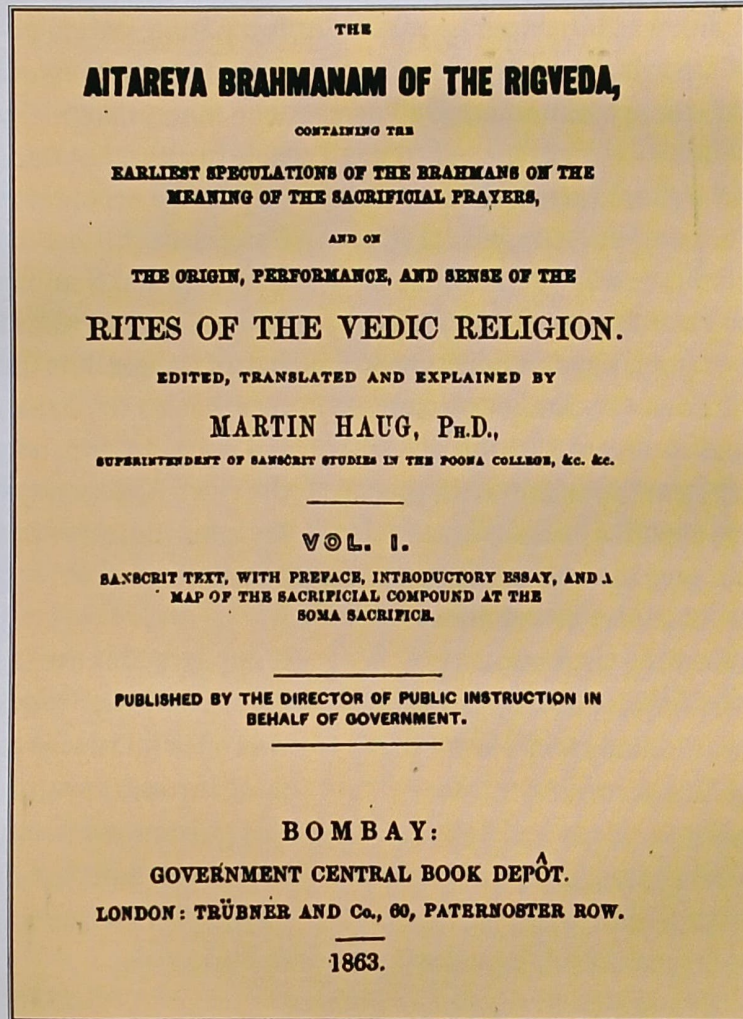
¹⁶ Bostock and Riley, *Natural History*, Vol. II, p. 44.

References in Brāhmaṇical Literary Heritage

The earliest possible reference in relation to Bengal is found in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* of the *Ṛgveda* that speaks of the Puṇḍra people. This is the instance where the Puṇḍras as a tribe are mentioned. The text of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* with English translation is as follows.

*tasya ha viśvāmitrasyaikaśataṁ putrā āsuḥ | pañcāśad eva jyāyāṁ so madhucchandash pañcāśat
kanīyāṁsas | tad ye jyāyāṁso na te kuśalaṁ menire | tān anuvyājahāra | antaṁ vaḥ prajā bhakṣīṣṭeti | ta
ete 'ndhrāḥ puṇḍrāḥ śabarāḥ pulindā mutibā iti...*¹⁷

This Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra had a hundred sons, fifty of them were older than Madhucchandash, and fifty were younger than he. The older ones were not pleased with (the installation of Śunaḥśepa to the primogeniture). Viśvāmitra then pronounced against them the curse, "You shall have the lowest castes for your descendants." Therefore are many of the most degraded classes of men, the rabble for the most part, such as the Andhras, Puṇḍras, Śabaras, Pulindas and Mutibas, descendants of Viśvāmitra.¹⁸



Reference to Puṇḍra
people in *Aityareya
Brāhmaṇa* of the
Ṛgveda

¹⁷ Haug (ed.), *The Aitareya Brahmanam*, vol. 1, p. 183.

¹⁸ Haug, *The Aitareya Brahmanam*, in *The Sacred Book of the Hindus*, Extra vol., p. 321.

वाचाजीर्गतः सौयवसिस्तद्वै मा तात तर्पति पापं कर्म मया
तदहं निन्देवे तुभ्यं प्रतियंतु शता गवामिति स होवाच शुनः
यः सकृत्पापकं कुर्यात्कुर्यादेनत्ततो ऽरं; नापागाः शीद्रान्यायाद
त्वया कृतमित्यसंधेयमिति ह विश्वामित्र उपपपाद. स होवा-
श्वामित्रो, भीम एव सौयवसिः शासेन विशिशसिपुः;
ज्यैतस्य पुत्रो भूर्ममैवोपेहि पुत्रतामिति सहोवाच शुनःशे-
वै यथा नो ज्ञपया राजपुत्र तथा वद; यथैवागिरसः सनु
त्व पुत्रतामिति स होवाच विश्वामित्रो ज्येष्ठो मे त्वं पुत्रा-
गस्तव श्रेष्ठा मजा स्यात्, उपेया दैव मे दायं तेन वै स्वोप-
इति स होवाच शुनःशेपः, संज्ञानानेषु वै ब्रूयात्सौहा-
मे श्रियै, यथा ऽहं भरत ऋषभोपेयां तव पुत्रतामित्यथ ह
मित्रः पुत्रानामंत्रयामास, मधुछंदाः शृणोतन ऋषभो रेणुर-
पे केच भ्रातरः स्थ नास्मै ज्येष्ठयाय कल्पध्वमिति ॥ १७ ॥
एष ह विश्वामित्रस्यैकशतं पुत्रा आसुः. पंचाशदेव ज्यायां
धुछंदसः पंचाशत्कनीयांसस्तथे ज्यायांसो न ते कुशलं
ताननुभ्याजहारातान्वः मजा भक्षीष्टेति त एतेधाः पुंड्राः
: पुलिंदा मूतिबा इत्युदंत्या बहवो भवंति वैश्वामित्रा
। भूयिष्ठाः. स होवाच मधुछंदः पंचशता सार्धं, यन्नः पिता
। ते तस्मिंस्तिष्ठामहे वयं; पुरस्त्वा सर्वैरुर्महे त्वामन्वंचो वयं
यथ ह विश्वामित्रः प्रतीतः पुत्रास्तुष्टाव. ते वै पुत्राः पशुमंतो
। भविष्यथ ये मानं मे ऽनु गृह्णन्तो वीरवंतमकर्त मा पुर एत्रा
। देवरातेन गाथिनाः. सर्वे राध्याः स्य पुत्रा एष वः सद्विवाचनं
: कुशिका वीरो देवरातस्तमन्वित. युष्माश्च दायं म उपेता
यामु च विद्यासि. ते सम्यंचो वैश्वामित्राः सर्वे साकं सरातयः;

The Sacred Books of the Hindus
Translated by various Sanskrit Scholars
AND
Edited by Major B. D. Basu, I. M. S. (Retired)
Extra Volume 4
THE
Aitareya Brahmanam of the Rigveda,

CONTAINING THE
EARLIEST SPECULATIONS OF THE BRAHMANS ON THE
MEANING OF THE SACRIFICIAL PRAYERS,
AND ON
THE ORIGIN, PERFORMANCE AND SENSE OF THE
rites of the Vedic Religion

EDITED, TRANSLATED AND EXPLAINED, WITH PREFACE,
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, AND A MAP OF THE
SACRIFICIAL COMPOUND AT THE
SOMA SACRIFICE

BY

MARTIN HAUG, Ph. D.,

Superintendent of Sanscrit Studies in the Poona College, &c., &c.-



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which no reconcilia- [468] tion exists." "Yes, irreconcilable (is this act)," interrupted Viśvāmitra.

Viśvāmitra then said, "Fearful was Sugavasa's son (to look at) when he was standing ready to murder, holding the knife in his hand; do not become his son again; but enter my family as my son." Śunahśepa then said, "O prince, let us know, tell (us) how I, as an *Aṅgirasah*, can enter thy family as thy (adopted) son?" Viśvāmitra answered, "Thou shalt be the first-born of my sons, and thy children the best. Thou shalt now enter on the possession of my divine heritage. I solemnly instal thee to it." Śunahśepa then said, "When thy sons should agree to thy wish that I should enter thy family, O thou best of the Bharatas! then tell them for the sake of my own happiness to receive me friendly." Viśvāmitra then addressed his sons as follows: "Hear ye now, *Madhuchhandah*, *Riṣabha*, *Renu*, *Aṣṭaka*, and all ye brothers, do not think ¹² yourselves (entitled) to the right of primogeniture, which is (Śunahśepa's)."

18

(On Viśvāmitra's Descendants. How the Reciters of the Śunahśepa story are to be Rewarded by the King. Stanzas. On the Pratigara for the Richas and Stanzas at this Occasion.)

This Rishi Viśvāmitra had a hundred sons, fifty of them were older than Madhuchhandās, and fifty were younger than he. The older ones were not pleased with (the installation of Śunahśepa to the primogeniture). Viśvāmitra then pronounced against [470] them the curse, "You shall have the lowest castes for your descendants." Therefore are many of the most degraded classes of men, the rabble for the most part, such as the *Andhras*, *Pundras*, *Śabaras*, *Palindas*, and *Mūtibas*, descendants of Viśvāmitra. But Madhuchhandās, with the fifty younger sons, said, "What our father approves of, by that we abide; we all accord to thee (Śunahśepa) the first rank, and we will come after thee!" Viśvāmitra, delighted (at this answer) then praised these sons with the following verses:

"Ye my sons will have abundance of cattle and children, for you have made me rich in children by consenting to my wish."

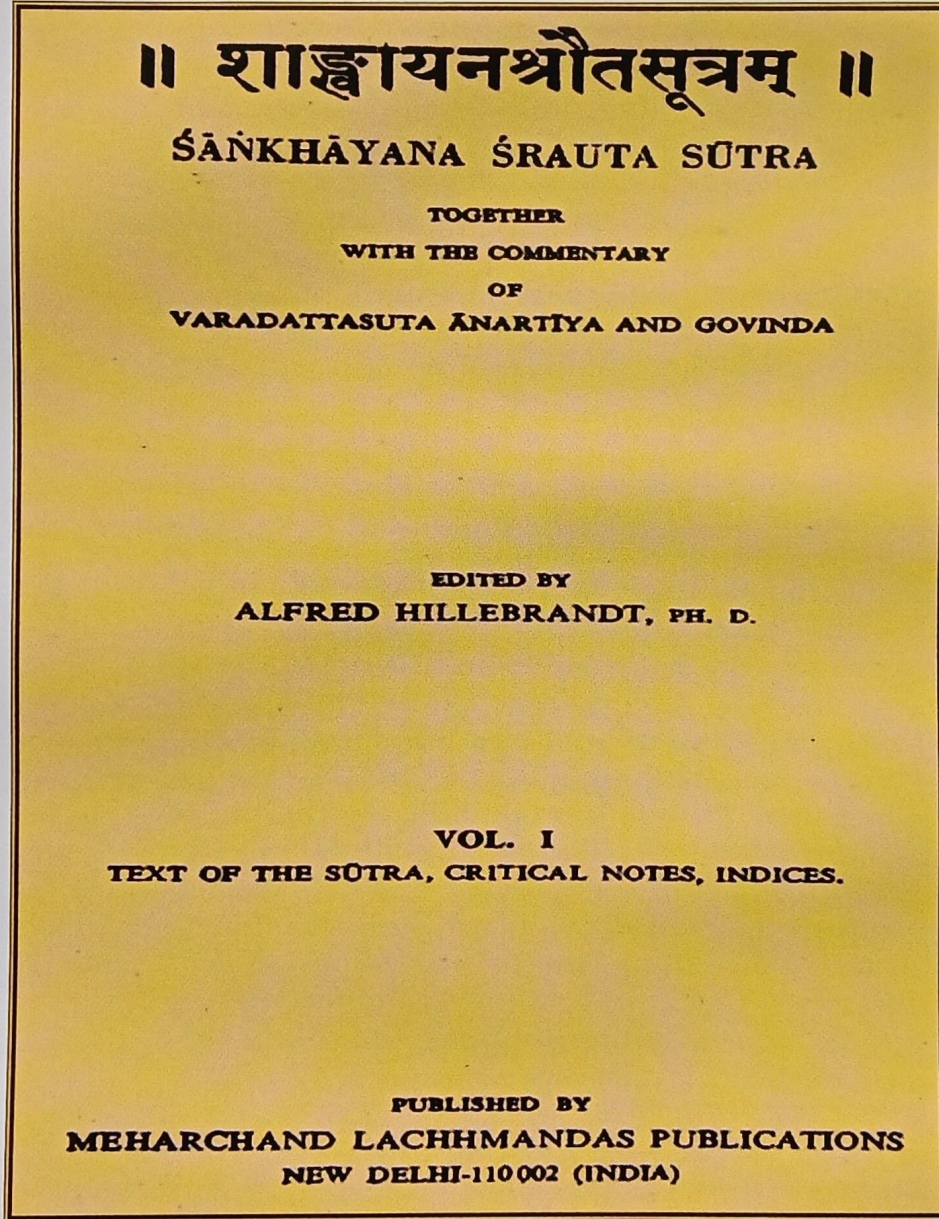
¹² I have parsed the word *sthana* as *stha na*. If *sthana* is taken as a 2nd person plural, as Max Müller (following Śāyana) does in his translation of the story of Śunahśepa (*History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, page 418), the passage is to be translated as follows: "and all you brothers that you are, think him to be entitled to the primogeniture."

Although historians in a large scale share different opinions about the timeline of the Vedic literature especially the *Rgveda*, they agree that, The Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and the earliest Upaniṣads must for the greater part have existed in their present form before the rise of Buddhism in the second half of the 6th century BC and before the spread of the Aryan culture and the establishment of Vedic 'schools' in the South of India.¹⁹

¹⁹ Gonda (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 1, fasc. 1, p. 20.

Hence, following the views of scholars it can definitely be said that the text of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* belongs to a period not later than 6th century BCE.

The same passage of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* is dittoed in the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasūtra*.²⁰



²⁰ Cf. Hillebrandt (ed.), *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, vol. 1, p. 195.

Reference to Puṇḍra
people in Śāṅkhāyana
Śrautasūtra of the
R̥gveda

१५. २७. १]

शास्त्रायनश्रौतसूत्रे ।

१८५

मधुच्छन्दाः षट्षोतन चषभो रेणुगृहकः ।

ये के च भानरः स्या अक्षौ जैष्ठ्याय तिष्ठध्वम् ॥ इति ।

तस्य हैकशतं पुत्रा आसुः । पञ्चाशदेव व्यायांशो मधुच्छन्दसः
पञ्चाशत्कनीयांसः । तद्ये व्यायांशो न ते कुशलं मेनिरे । ताननु-
व्याजहार । अन्नं वः प्रजा भक्षीष्टेति । त एते । अन्धाः पुण्ड्राः
श्वरा मूचीषा इति । उदचो बह्मदक्षवो वैश्यामिचा दम्भूनां
भृयिष्ठा इत्युदाहरन्ति । अथ ये मधुच्छन्दःप्रभृतयः कनीयांसस्य
कुशलं मेनिरे । स ह जगौ मधुच्छन्दाः ।

यं नः पिता संजानीते तस्मिंस्तिष्ठामहे वयम् ।

पुरस्तात्सर्वे कुर्महे त्वामन्वक्षो वयं भ्रातृभिः ॥ इति ।

अथ ह विद्यामिचः प्रतीतः पुत्रांस्तुष्टाव ॥ २६ ॥

ते वै पुत्राः पशुमन्तः प्रजावन्तो भविष्यन्ति ।

ये मानं मे ऽनुगृह्णन्तो वीरवन्तमकर्तं मा ॥

पुण्ड्रा वीरवन्तो देवरातेन गाथिनाः ।

सर्वे राक्षसास्तु पुत्रा एष वस्तुदिवाचनः ॥

एष वः कुशिका वीरो देवरातस्तमन्वित ।

युष्मांश्च दातुं चोपेतां विद्यां यासुत विद्यामि ॥

ते सम्यक्षो वैश्यामिचाः सर्वे साकं वरातयः ।

देवराताय तस्मिन्ने जैष्ठ्ये जैष्ठ्ये च गाथिनाः ॥

अधीयते देवराता रिक्थयोऽभयोर्ध्वजिः ।

जङ्गूनां चाधितस्मिन्ने देवे वेदे च गाथिनाः ॥

तदेतच्छ्रौतः प्रपमाख्यानं परःशतर्गायमपरिमितम् । तद्भूताभि-

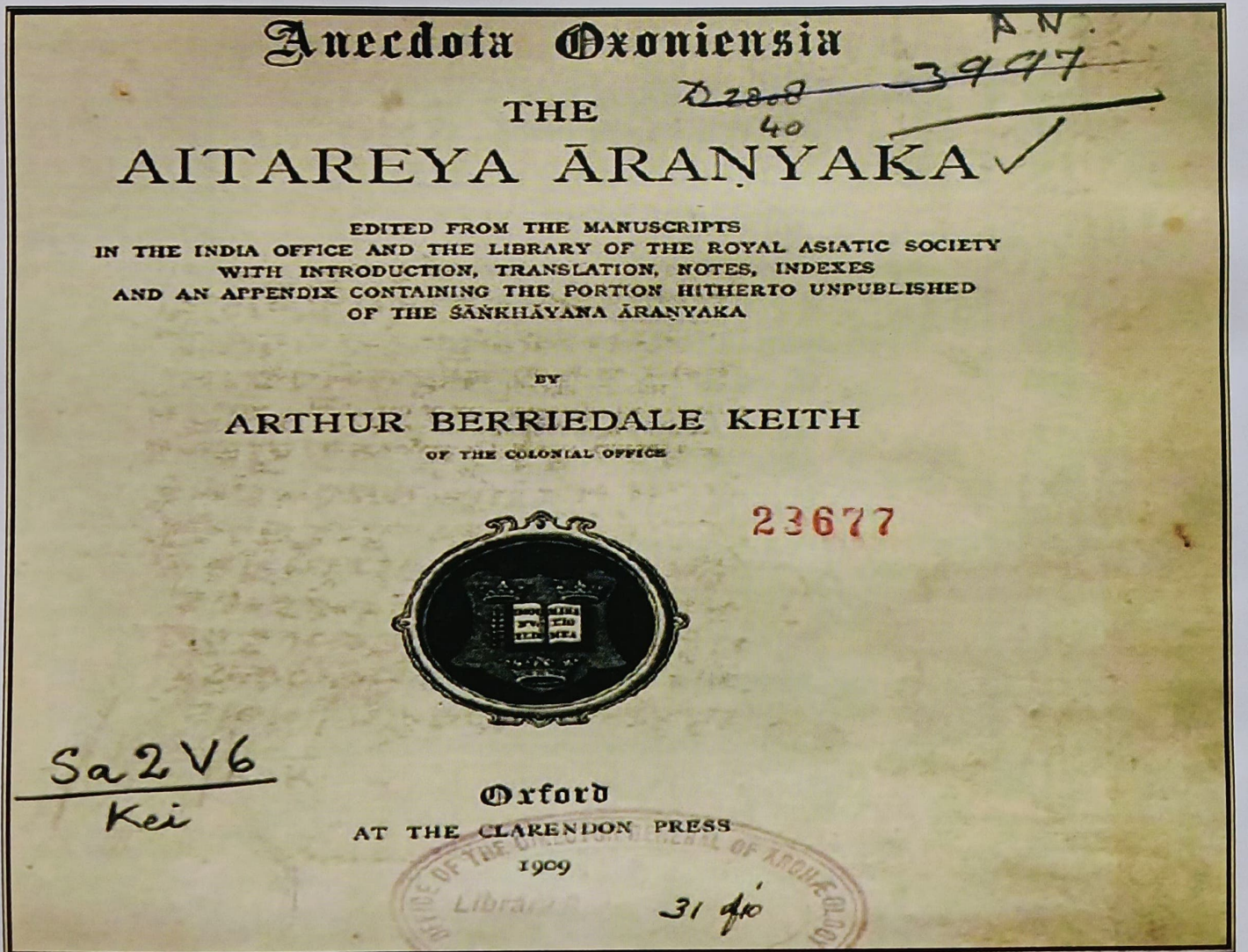
This text too is affiliated to the R̥gveda. The Śrautasūtras, in general, deal with Vedic rites. These are included in the Kalpasūtra, one of the six Vedāṅgas. According to Brian K Smith,

The oldest extant text composed in sūtras is the Śrauta Sūtra of the Baudhayana school, dated to about the seventh century BCE. Other Śrauta Sūtras, representing the ritual according to other schools, were composed over the course of the next several centuries...²¹

21 Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance*, p. 120.

Smith, further, in his book mentioned the views of C.G. Kashikar and Ram Gopal, who suggest that the Sūtra literature belongs to 800-300 BCE and 800-500 BCE respectively.²² The *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* of the *Ṛgveda*, further, mentioned Vaṅgas as tribal people, which in turn again proves the antiquity of the region. The text runs as follows.

prajā ha tisro atyāyamīyur iti yā vai tā imāḥ prajāś tisro atyāyamāyaṁś tānīmāni vayāṁsi vaṅgāvagādhas cerapādāḥ |²³



²² Cf. loc. cit., f.n.

²³ Keith, *The Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, p. 101; for English translation of the text see pp. 199-200.

॥ अथ द्वितीयारण्यकम् ॥

ADHYĀYA 1.

एष पन्था एतत्कर्मैतद्भूतस्तन्यम् । तस्माच्च प्रमाद्येत्तन्ना-
 तीयात् । न ह्यत्यायन्पूर्वे येऽत्यायंस्ते परावभूवुः । तदुक्तमृषिणा ।
 प्रजा ह तिस्रो अत्यायमीयुर्यन्या अर्कमभितो विविश्रे । बृहद्
 तस्यौ भुवनेष्वन्तः पवमानो हरित आ विवेशेति ॥ प्रजा ह
 तिस्रो¹ अत्यायमीयुरिति या वै ता इमाः प्रजास्तिस्रो² अत्याय-
 मायंस्तानीमानि वयोसि वङ्गावगथाचेरपादाः । न्यन्या अर्कम-
 भितो विविश्रे इति ता इमाः प्रजा अर्कमभितो निविष्टा
 इममेवाग्निम् । बृहद् तस्यौ भुवनेष्वन्तरित्यद् उ एव बृहद्भुवने-
 ष्वन्तरसावादित्यः । पवमानो हरित आ विवेशेति वायुरेव
 पवमानो दिशो³ हरित आविष्टः⁴ ॥१॥

Reference to Vaṅga in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* of the *Rgveda*

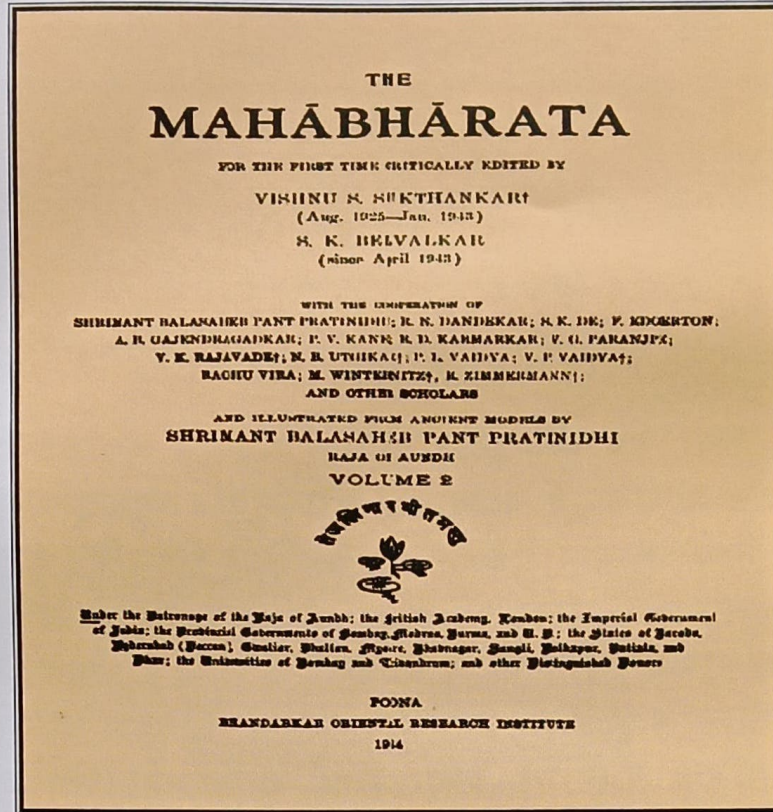
In the texts of post-Vedic era a number of mentions of places and people related to ancient Bengal are found. The foremost of these texts is the *Mahābhārata* of Vyāsa, where we trace the names of Vaṅga, Puṇḍra, Suhma and Tāmralipta. It should be mentioned that this voluminous work is not a single poetic composition. The text appears to have passed through at least three tiers. The transformation of the text into the present form perhaps took place between 4th century BCE and 4th century CE. According to some scholars the *Mahābhārata* war might have taken place in the 10th century BCE.²⁴ However, the verses are as follows.

vaṅgapuṇḍrakirāteṣu rājā balasamanvita |
 puṇḍrako vāsudeveti yo 'sau lokeṣu viśrutaḥ ||

(*Mahābhārata* 2.13.19)²⁵

24 Cf. Banerjee, *A Companion to Sanskrit Literature*, p. 234.

25 Sukthankar (ed.), *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2.



2. 13. 18]

महाभारते

[मणपर्व]

आदये सततं मोहायः स चिह्नं च मामकम् ॥ १८

वृक्षान्वाकिरातेषु राखा बलसमन्वितः ।

पोष्को वासुदेवैति योऽसौ लोकेषु विभुतः ॥ १९

चतुर्षुः स महाराज भोज इन्द्रसखो बली ।

विद्याबलापो व्यजपत्याम्बकचकैशिकान् ॥ २०

आता यस्याहुतिः क्षुरो जामदग्न्यसमो युधि ।

स भक्तो मागधं राजा मीम्पकः परवीरहा ॥ २१

Gs वक्षः; Gs वक्षय (for वः स). Ks Ds Gs स; B; तु (for च).

19 " Ks वक्षयुर्द; Ks वंगयुर्द; V; वंगयुर्द; D; स वंगयुर्द; T; G. s. वंगयुर्द; M; वंगयुर्द. Gs वक्षयुर्द. किरातेषु (hypermetric). — " B; S (except M) राजा बलसमन्वितः. — " Ks Gs. वृक्षेषु (Ks 'के; Ks. सवर्ण; Ds. सवर्ण). Ks वृत् (for वृत्). — " Ks B; सवर्ण वक्षयुः; B (except B. s.) D; s. Gs (before corr.) कोकेति (Ds देवेति) विषयः; Ds Ds. कोकेति (for कोकेति वि').

20 " Ks Ns V; B D Cd वृक्षयाम् (Ds स च सवर्ण); T; G वृक्षयुर्द (Gs 'थेको); M. s. वृक्षयुर्द (for वृक्षयुर्द); Ks. वृक्षयुर्दवपरो राजा; Ks. वृक्षयुः स वरो राजा. Cf v.l. 8. — " Ks T; आता; Gs राजन्; Gs भोज (for वक्षयुः); Ds भोजेति (for भोज इन्द्र). Ks Ds वृक्षयाम्; G (Gs lacuna) M. s. सतो (Gs 'वरो' (for 'सको). — " Ks B; विद्याबलापो; Ds 'भ्यो. Ks B; सवर्ण; B; S [विजपत्या]; Ds विजपय (for विजपत्या). V; B. s. Ds विद्याबलापो सवर्ण; Ds विद्या बलापो दे च (in विद्याबलापोऽस्या); S विद्यासुभक्तो (M. s. वृक्षयुर्दो) योऽसौ. — " Ks पोष्कचकैशिकान् (sic); Ns B. s. Ds Ds स पोष्कचकैशिकान्; V; B. s. Ds.

विद्याप्याचरतः प्रह्वान्त्सदा संभन्धिनः सततः ।

भजतो न भजत्यस्मानप्रियेषु व्यवस्थितः ॥ २२

न कुलं न पलं राज्ञश्चमिजानंस्तथात्मनः ।

पश्यमानो यद्यो दीप्तं जरासंभमुपाश्रितः ॥ २३

उदीच्यमोजाश्च तथा कुलान्यष्टादशभिर्महो ।

जरासंभमपादेव प्रतीचीं दिशमभ्रिताः ॥ २४

शरसेना भद्रकारा बोधाः श्रान्ताः पटभराः ।

22 G. s. om. 23 (cf. v.l. 21). — " Ks 'व्याक-
सिने; B. s. 'व्याकरति; S (except Gs; G. s. om.)
'सि बरतः (Gs 'ता). Ks Ns V; Gs सवर्ण; B. D. s.
प्रह; B. s. मातः; D. s. प्रहान् (for प्रहान्). — " Ks विषः
T; G (Gs. om.) M. s. बलान्; M. s. सवर्ण (for सवर्ण).
Ks Ns B. s. D. s. ततः; Ks सवर्ण; B. s. सुतः; D. s. सुतः;
D. s. सुतः; S (Gs. om.) ततः (for सवर्ण). — " Ks Gs
Cv सवर्ण (for सवर्ण). T; M. s. [ए] स; Gs Cv [ए] सवर्ण
(for [ए] सवर्ण). — " Ks विषेयु न; Ks न विषेयु;
V; B. s. विषेयु; Gs विषेयु न; Cv सविषेयु (as in text).

23 G. s. om. 23* (cf. v.l. 21). — " B. s. सु-
B. s. D (except D. s.) स (for the second स).
D. s. सुतः; Gs सुतः (for सुतः). T; राजा (for राजन्).
— " Ks Gs नाभिजान्; Ks नाभिजान्; Ns B. s. s.
D. s. अम्बजान्; V; B. s. नाभिजान्; B. s. नाम्बजान्;
D. s. अम्बजान्; D. s. अम्बजान्; D. s. नाभिजान्; D. s.
अम्बजान्; T; G. s. M. s. नाभिजान्; M. s. नाभि
(for नाभिजान्). M. s. अपाजान्; M. s. तपाजान्. Gs. s.
नाभिजा (Gs 'जा) नाभिजान्. — " Ks सस बावो; B. s.
पदसबावि (for पदसबावो). — " Ks उपाधिता; Ns
समाधिता; B. s. D. s. उपाधिता; D. s. अपाधिता;
Gs. s. उपाधिता (Gs 'सिता).

Reference to Vaṅga and
Pundra in the *Sabhaparvan*
of *Mahābhārata* of Vyāsa

ubhau balvṛtau vīrāv ubhau tīvraparākramau |
nirjityājau mahārāja vaṅgarājam upādravat |

(Mahābhārata 2.31.11)²⁶

2. 27. 21]

महाभारते

[दिग्विजयपर्व]

C. 2. 1087
B. 2. 20. 23
E. 2. 21. 24

उभौ बलवृत्तौ वीरावृत्तौ तीव्रपराक्रमौ ।
निजित्वाजौ महाराज वङ्गराजमुपाव्रवत् ॥ २१
सहस्रसेनं निजित्य चन्द्रसेनं च पार्थिवम् ।
ताम्रलिप्तं च राजानं काचं वङ्गाधिपं तथा ॥ २२
सुहृन्नामधिपं चैव ये च सागरवासिनः ।
सर्वान्मलेच्छगणांश्चैव विजित्ये भरतर्षभ ॥ २३
एवं बहुविधान्देशान्विजित्य पवनान्मजः ।
वसु तेभ्य उपादाय लौहित्यमगमद्वली ॥ २४

इति श्रीमहाभारते समापर्वणि सप्तविंशोऽध्यायः ॥ २७ ॥

स सर्वान्मलेच्छनृपतीन्सागरद्वीपवासिनः ।
करमाहारयामास रत्नानि विविधानि च ॥ २५
चन्दनागुरुवस्त्राणि मणिमुक्तमनुचमम् ।
काञ्चनं रजतं वज्रं विद्रुमं च महाधनम् ॥ २६
स कोटिशतसंख्येन धनेन महता तदा ।
अभ्यवर्षदमेयात्मा धनवर्षेण पाण्डवम् ॥ २७
इन्द्रप्रस्थमयागम्य भीमो भीमपराक्रमः ।
निवेदयामास तदा धर्मराजाय तद्वनम् ॥ २८

— *) Ks कौत्सिकीकृच्छनिलयो; B1 कौत्सिकीकृच्छनिलयं;
B2 T1 Gs कौत्सिकं कृच्छ; D1.2 कौत्सिकी 'वा'; D2
(m as in text) 'वाद'निलयं; G1.2 विजित्य कृच्छनिलयं;
G2.2 कात्सिकं कृच्छ; G3 कौत्सिकीकृच्छ. — G1.2 om.
20^a-21^a. — *) B1.2.3 D1.2 महाबले (for महीजसम्).
Ks D2 राजानमस्मिन्तौजसं.

21 Ś1 om. 21; G1.2 om. 21^{ab} (cf. v.l. 18, 20).
— *) K1 B2 बलवृत्तौ; Ks Ś1 B1.2 D2 D3 G2 M1
'वृत्तौ'; V2 स बलिनौ; B2.2.3 सुबलिनौ; D1.2 बलं वृत्तौ;
T1 लम्बवृत्तौ; G2 damaged; G4.2 बलवृत्तौ; M2 बलवृत्तौ;
B2 वीरौ (for वीरौ). — *) Ks नवपराक्रमौ; B2 भीम';
G2 वीरपराक्रमं. — *) Ks D2 विजित्वाजौ; B1 निजित्य लौ;
D2 G2 निजित्वाजौ. T1 G2.3 M महावीरौ (T1 'वीरौ';
G2 'रा'; G4 M1 'वीरौ'). — *) K1 बहुराजम्; G2 वंश';
G3 वाक'.

22 *) G2.3 सामुद्र'. — *) Ś1 चन्द्रदेवं. G2 पार्थिवः.
— *) K1.2.4 M रामलिप्तं; B2 D2 सम'; G2 दामलिप्तं;
G2 रामलिप्तं; G2 राम'. — *) G2 कचं; G4 कुचं. G2
वङ्गाधिपं. Ś1 Ks.2 D2 (orig.) कासी (Ks 'सि')नामधिपं
(D2 by corr. सकानामधिपं); K2.2 कासीनामधिपं; Ś1 V1
B D2 D1.2 कर्षं (B1.2 कर्षं; D2.2 कर्षं; D1.2 कर्षः;
D2 कर्षं)दाधिपतिं; T1 कौचवंका'; G2 काळवंका'. G2
कौत्सिकामाधिपं वृषं; G2 कौचं वङ्गाधिपं च स. — After 22,
G1 ins.:

०००० —————

पुरुषर्षभः (Ks 'म'); B2 भरतर्षभ. G2 पूर्वर्षभोऽन्यथापि.
— After 23, G1 (om. lines 1 and 3). s-ins.:

224* किराण्यनुसूयार्थं कर्मप्रवर्णनानि ।

ये च काकमुखा नाम नरराक्षसपुत्राः ।

किराण्यनुसूयार्थं किराण्यनुसूयार्थम् ।

24 B4 om. 24 (cf. v.l. 23); T1 om. 24^{ab}.

— *) G1 एवं विविधविधानि. — *) D1.2 निजित्य. G2.2
M2 (orig.) भरतर्षभः; G2.2 M1.2 (by corr.) पुरुषर्षभः.
G1 नाभादेशान्वित्य स. — G1 om. 24^a-25^a. — *)
Ś1 Ks.2 D2 कर्षं (for वंश). T1 G2.2 M2 वसुधैवाकु (G2
'वृ')पादाय. — *) G2 damaged. K1 लौहित्यम्; Ks
D2.2 S (G1 om.) लौहित्यम्. K1 T1 G2.2.3 वली
(for वली). B1.2.2 D1.2 लौहित्यमुपवर्णनम्.

25 B4 G1 om. 25^{ab} (cf. v.l. 23, 24). — *)
G2 सर्वान्मलेच्छान् वृषतीन्; G2 स सर्वान्मलेच्छान् वृषतीन्; G2
सर्वान्मलेच्छान् वृषतीन्. — *) Ś1 सागरदिप'; V1 B D2
D1.2 सागरान् (D2.2 'रू'; D2.2 D2 'वृ')व'; G2 सगर्दीप'.
— *) K1 D2 करमाहर'; K2 करमाहर'.

26 *) B1.2.2 D1.2 चन्दनागुरुवस्त्राणि; D2.2 D2.2 S
'गुरुवस्त्राणि (T1 'गुरुवस्त्राणि). — *) Ś1 G2 M मणिमुक्तं
(M1 'मुक्त')मनु; V1 B1.2.2 D1.2 मणिमुक्तमनुचमं;
B2 D2 D2.2 'मणिमुक्तमनुचमं'; D2 (before corr.)
'मुक्तमनुचमं; G1 प्रवाहमणिमौक्तिकम्. — *) Ks.2 B2.2
G2.2 M1 राजतं. Ś1 Ks D2 T1 G2.2 वज्रं; Ś1 V1

pauṇḍrako vāsudevaś ca vaṅgaḥ kāliṅgakas tathā |
ākaraṣaḥ kuntalaścaiva vānavāsyāndhrakāstathā |

(Mahābhārata 2.31.11)²⁷

2. 47. 7]

महाभारते

[अष्टमस्कन्ध]

शुद्धा विप्रोक्तमार्हाणि राह्वान्यजिनानि च ॥ ७

परि च कृत्यवादाय भरुहण्टनिवासिनः ।

उपनिषुर्महाराज इयान्गान्धारदेशजान् ॥ ८

इन्द्रहृदयैर्तयन्ति धान्यैर्नदीपुत्रैश्च ये ।

समुद्रनिष्कृष्टे जात्याः परिसिन्धु च मानवाः ॥ ९

व परायाः पारदाय वज्राय कितवेः सह ।

विविधं बलिमादाय रक्षानि विविधानि च ॥ १०

[illegible]

८४२° ते सर्वे पाण्डुरास्त्रय इत्येतिहिरण्यः ।

[illegible]

[232]

अजाविकं गोहिरण्यं सरोध्रं फलजं मधु ।

कम्बलान्विविषांश्चैव द्वारि सिष्ठन्ति वारिजाः ॥११॥

प्राग्ज्योतिषाधिपः नूरो म्लेच्छानामधिपो बली ।

पचनेः सहितो राजा मगदधो महारथः ॥ १२

आज्ञानेयान्दयाञ्शीघ्रान्दायाभिस्त्रहसः ।

पति च कृत्यमादाय द्वारि सिद्धिं यारितः ॥ १३

अश्वसारथ्यं भाण्डं हृद्गदन्तरसरूनसीन् ।

Ga) गु (for व). Ga) के (for वे). K Ri) V: Ba Dn
 Ga) कावेर्षे व वरिद्युषि: — °) K) लसुदुविहसिपः. Ks) Ds
 "सिन्दु: Ds "सिन्दु: Ti Ga) सिन्दुषि: Ga) M) "सिन्दु: M)
 सिन्दु: Ga) "सिन्दुषा (for "सिन्दु: Ga) वावा: Ga)
 वषा: (for वावा:). Ba Ds) वावुर्षे सिन्दुषि (Di) Ve)
 "Di) वावा: Ga) लसुदुविहसिपःवावा: Ga) लसुदुविहसिपःवावा:
 — °) d) Ds) Di) वावेर्षे व वरिद्युषि व वावा: (Di): K) Ri)
 V: B Dn) Di) वावेर्षे Di) वावेर्षु (Di—°) "डु) व वा:
 B वावेर्षे (Di) "Ga) "Ga) "सिन्दुविहसिपः (Ga) वरिद्यु
 सिन्दुषि: Ti).

10 °) K_1 G.a.o. M ते हुज्जः, G₂ केजिया (sie) (for तेजिया). N_1 वास्तव्यः, G₂ वसिस्तव्यः. K_2 के वेयाः वास्तव्यः, B (except Ba) D₁o है (Ba से है by transposition) वा (D₂ व) वास्तव्यः, G₂ ते हुज्जः वास्तव्यः, G₂ से हुज्जः वास्तव्यः. — °) K_2 Dn (1) D वास्तव्यः, B₁ a.o. हुज्जः, Ba तुल्यः (for वास्तव्य). K_2 D₂ वस्तव्यः, N_2 V₁ वस्तव्यः, B D₁o वस्तव्यः (for वस्तव्यः). S वास्तव्यः (G.a.o. वास्तव्यः केजिया वा (G₂ वास्तव्य). — °) K_2 वसिस्तव्यः S वसि वसिस्तव्यः (by transpos.)

11. ^a) G₂ ब्रह्म (for ब्रह्म). — ^a) = 3^d, 2D^o, etc.
D₂ द्वारे (for द्वारे). K₂-o G₁ [अ]विद्युत् (K₂ वि)
(for विद्युत्). G₂ [अ]परिवा.

12 *) Si , Ti , Cr M_1 स्थिति (for स्थिति). — *) K_1 स्थिति; M_2 स्थिति (for स्थिति). K_1 , B_1 , D_2 स्थिति (for स्थिति). — *) K_1 स्थिति; Ti , Cr , M_1 स्थिति; G_1 , G_2 , G_3 स्थिति.

13 *) Śa. कालादीनाम्, K₂ B.^a D₁ कालादीनाम्, G₂
कालादीनाम्, G₃ कालाद् च, D₂ कालादीनाम् (mag. var.
कालादीनाम्). — *) K₁ "सिन्" (for "सिन्"). — *) = 6".
K₂ = वली (K₂ "सि") विविधता (K₂ "ग") नाम्ने. — *) Śa.

(m as in text) Ks BLA.s DL.s GL.s विदिति; Ks.
[म]विदिति; Ks [म]विदिति; Si: (m as in text) [म]व-
दिता; Ks BLA.s DL.s T: वारिता; Ss [म]वारिता.
14 " G: म... Cv as in text.

1

śauṇḍikāḥ kukkurās caiva śakās caiva viśāṁ pateḥ |
aṅgā **vaṅgās** ca **punḍrās** ca śānavatyā gayās tathā |

(*Mahābhārata* 2.48.15)²⁹

सभापर्व

[2. 48. 19]

कृतकाराः सुबलयस्ततो द्वारमवाप्स्यथ ॥ १८

ईषादन्तान्हेमकक्षान्यबवर्णान्कुथावृतान् ।

शैलामाभित्यमत्तांश्च अभितः काम्यकं सरः ॥ १९

C. 2. 1877
D. 2. 52. 20
E. 2. 79. 03

वृत्तः। Bz Ds: च (for हे). Ss सोम्यते; Ds चार्यते
 (for सोम्यते). 8 उच्यते (Ga.s 'व्य' जे वन हि हार्यते किमराय
 विविता; Os निर्विवाः). — 8 om. 18th. — 1) Ks
 कृतकारा; Ks कृताः कर्कश; Ks कृतकारा; Ks Bz m.s.
 Dn Ds.s. Gd कृतकाराः (D: 'क'); V: 'का';
 Bz 'भारा'; Bz.s Ds.s Cap 'हाराः (for 'कारा:'.
 G.d.n gloss कृतमकाराः. Ks सुचकारा; V: सचकारः
 Gd सुचकारः (as in text). Ss कृतोपकारा कथनः. — 4)
 Ks अवाच्यता; Bzm अवचयय; Ds अवाचय.

19 ^a) MSS. ह्वा, ह्वा^a also (for ह्वा). Ks.
हैमकान्; Ks मत्ता; Bz. Ds 8 हे (Gs है)मकान्.
Cd as in text. Cn cites हैमकान्. — ^b) Ds सारावर्ण्य.
Gs सारावर्ण्य. Cd cites सारावर्ण्य.
Ks कुप्यास्तव्वा; Ns. T1 Gs कुप्यास्तव्वा; Ds कुप्यास्तव्वा;
Gs कुप्यास्तव्वा. Cd cites कुप्यास्तव्वा. Ss पूर्ववर्णान्कुप्य-
स्तव्वा. Ks सारावर्ण्यकुप्यास्तव्वा; Ks पूर्ववर्णान्कुप्यास्तव्वा.
V1 Bz. Ds-8 सु (V1 सु)कुप्यास्तवर्ण्यस्तव्वा. — Ks om.
(hapl.) 19°-20°. — ^c) Ds-8 अस्माकम् (for अस्माक).
T1 Gz. a. Ms पूर्ववर्णान्कुप्यास्तव्वा (Gs मास्माकान्);
Gz. a-8 Ms पूर्ववर्ण (Gs सर्वे) निस्माकान्. — ^d
Ss Kz. 6 Ns. V1 Bz. Dn Ds [अ]स्तवत्; Ks
[अ]स्तवत्; T1 Gs अस्तवत्; Gz अस्तवत्; Ds अस्तवत्;
Gs अस्तवत् (for अस्तवत्). Cr cites अस्तवत् (as in
text). Ks कामकुप्यास्तव्वा; Ds कामकुप्यास्तव्वा; Ds कुप्यास्तवत्;
(Gs कुप्यास्तवत्) कुप्यास्तवत्. Cr कुप्यास्तवत्. Sastri's
Appendix, p. 7] निस्माकम् (for कामकुप्यास्तवत्).

20 Ks om. 20th (cf. v.l. 19). S transp. 20th and 20th. — *) Ti Gz.s दस जणं; Gz.s M दस दस (for दसदस). Bz दस दसदस दसदस; Gz दसदसदस दसदस. — *) Kz दस दसदसदस; S (Mz) दसदसदसदस (for दसदस). — *) Kz 1.2; N1 B Dm Ds Gz दसदसदस. K1 कसीनकां; N1 B Dm.1 (by corr.) Ds Gz Ms.

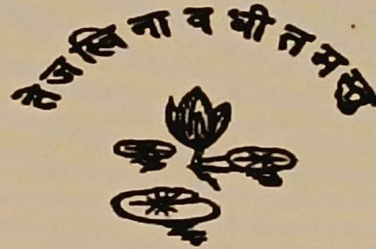
(*Mahābhārata* 6.10.44)³¹

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1972

गोमती घृतपापां च वन्दनां च महानदीम् ।
 कौशिकी त्रिदिशां कृत्यां विचित्रां लोह्यतारिणीम् ॥ १७
 रथस्यां शतकुम्भं च सरयुं च नरेश्वर ।
 चर्मण्वती वेश्वती हस्तिशोभां दिशं तथा ॥ १८
 शतापरीं पयोणीं च परां भैरवीं तथा ।
 कावेरीं तुलुकां चापि धापीं शतवलाभम् ॥ १९
 निचीरां महितां चापि सुप्रयोगां नराधिप ।
 पवित्रां कुण्डलां सिन्धुं वाजिनीं पुरमालिनीम् ॥ २०
 पूर्वाभिरामां वीरां च भीमामोषयतीं तथा ।
 पलाशिनीं पापहरां महेन्द्रां पिप्पलावतीम् ॥ २१
 पारिवेणामसिक्तीं च सरलां भारमर्दिनीम् ।
 पुरुहीं प्रवरां मेनां मोघां पृतयतीं तथा ॥ २२
 घूमत्यामतिकृष्णां च सूर्यां छापीं च कौरव ।
 सवान्तिरामघृष्णां च कुशधारां महानदीम् ॥ २३
 शशिकान्तां शिवां चैव तथा वीरवतीमपि ।
 वास्तुं सुवास्तुं गौरीं च कम्पनां सहिरण्वतीम् ॥ २४
 हिरण्वतीं चित्रवतीं चित्रसेनां च निम्नगाम् ।
 रथचित्रां ज्योतिरथां विश्वामित्रां कपिल्लयम् ॥ २५
 वपेन्द्रां बहुलां चैव कृष्णामम्बुवाहिनीम् ।
 वैन्दवीं पिच्छलां वेण्णां तुङ्गवेणां महानदीम् ॥ २६
 विविशां कृष्णवेण्णां च ताम्रां च कपिलामपि ।
 शलुं सुवामां वेदाध्यां हरिस्तावां महापगाम् ॥ २७
 क्षीमां च पिच्छिलां चैव भारद्वाजीं च निम्नगाम् ।
 कौशिकीं निम्नगां शोणां बाहुदामथ चन्दनाम् ॥ २८
 दुर्गामन्तःशिलां चैव ब्रह्ममेध्यां बृहद्वतीम् ।
 चरक्षां महिरोहीं च तथा जम्बुनदीमपि ॥ २९
 सुनसां तमसां दासीं त्रिसामन्यां वराणसीम् ।
 लोहोद्धतकरां चैव पूर्णाशं च महानदीम् ॥ ३०
 मानवीं वृषभां चैव महानद्यो जनाधिप ।
 सवान्तिरामयां कृत्यां मन्दगां मन्दवाहिनीम् ॥ ३१

ब्रह्माणीं च महागौरीं दुर्गामपि च भारत ।
 चित्रोपलां चित्रवर्हा मञ्जुं मकरवाहिनीम् ॥ ३२
 मन्वाकिनीं वेतरणीं कोकां चैव महानदीम् ।
 शुक्तिमतीमरण्यां च पुष्पवेणुपलावतीम् ॥ ३३
 लोहित्यां करनोयां च तथैव वृषभर्त्तनीम् ।
 कुमारीमृषिकृत्यां च ब्रह्मकुल्यां च भारत ॥ ३४
 सरस्वतीः सुपुण्याश्च सर्वा गङ्गाश्च मारिष ।
 विश्वस्य मानरः सर्वाः सर्वाश्चैव महावलाः ॥ ३५
 तथा नयस्त्वप्रकाशः शतशोऽथ सहस्रशः ।
 इत्येताः सरितो राजन्समाख्याता यथास्मृति ॥ ३६
 अत उर्ध्वं जनपदान्निबोध गदतो मम ।
 तत्रेमे कुरुपाञ्चालाः शास्वमात्रेयजात्रालाः ॥ ३७
 शूरसेनाः कलिङ्गाश्च वोचा मीकास्तथैव च ।
 मत्स्याः सुकुट्यः सौवत्याः कुन्तलाः काशिकोशलाः ॥
 वेदियत्सा कुरुपाश्च भोजाः सिन्धुपुलिन्दकाः ।
 उत्तमीजा दशार्णाश्च मेकलाश्चोत्कलेः सह ॥ ३९
 पाञ्चालाः कौशिजाश्चैव एकपुष्टा कुण्डराः ।
 सौधा मद्रा मुजिङ्गाश्च काशयोऽपरकाशयः ॥ ४०
 जठराः कुक्षुशाश्चैव मुदाशार्णाश्च भारत ।
 कुन्तयोऽवन्तयश्चैव तथैवापरकुन्तवः ॥ ४१
 गोविन्दा मन्वकाः पण्डा विदर्भानूपवासिकाः ।
 अश्मकाः पांसुपट्टाश्च गोपराष्ट्राः पनीतकाः ॥ ४२
 आविराष्ट्राः सुकुट्टाश्च बलिराष्ट्रं च केवलम् ।
 वानरास्याः प्रवाहाश्च वका वक्रभयाः शकाः ॥ ४३
 विदेहका मागधाश्च सुह्याश्च विजयास्तथा ।
 अङ्गा वङ्गाः कलिङ्गाश्च यक्षलोमान एव च ॥ ४४
 मल्लः सुदेण्याः प्राहृतास्तथा माहिषकार्षिकाः ।
 वाहीका वाटधानाश्च आभीराः फाल्गुयकाः ॥ ४५
 अपरगन्नाश्च शूद्राश्च पङ्गवाश्चर्मखण्डिकाः ।
 अटवीशबराश्चैव मरुमौमाश्च मारिष ॥ ४६

prācyāś ca dākṣiṇātyāś ca pravīrā gajayodhinah |
 aṅgā vaṅgā punḍrāś ca māgadhaś tāmraliptakāḥ | |

(Mahābhārata 8.17.2)³²

32 Ibid., Karṇaparvan, p. 120.

KARNAPARVAN
E. P. L. VAIDYA

FASCICULE 30
KARNAPARVĀN, pt. 1

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

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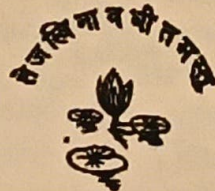
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SHRIMANT BALASAHEB PANT PRATINIDHI, B. N. DANDEKAR, S. K. DE, F. EDGERTON,
A. R. GAJENDRAGADKAR, P. V. KANE, B. D. KARMARKAR, V. G. PARANJPE,
V. K. RAJAYADE, N. B. UTOIKAR, P. L. VAIDYA, V. F. VAIDYA,
RAGHU VIRA, M. WINTERNITZ, R. ZIMMERMANN,
AND OTHER SCHOLARS

AND ILLUSTRATED FROM ANCIENT MODELS BY

SHRIMANT BALASAHEB PANT PRATINIDHI
RAJA OF AUNDH



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१६३७ सुदिशनीय पद्मानि प्रमृता इव च स्रजः ।
इतानी वदन्त्यासन्त्यात्राणि च महामते ॥ ३७

रूपाण्यत्यर्थकाम्यानि विरदाश्चतुर्णां नृप ।
सहस्रानीय वक्त्राणि प्रापुर्दुर्दर्शता परम् ॥ ३८

इति श्रीमहाभारते कर्णपर्वणि वोढघोऽध्याय ॥ १५ ॥

१७

संजय उवाच ।
इतिमिच्छु महामात्रास्तव पुत्रेण चोदिताः ।
वृद्धमुन्र जिवांसन्तः क्रुद्धाः पार्थवमभ्ययुः ॥ १

प्राप्याश्च दाक्षिणात्याश्च प्रवीरा गजयोधिनः ।
जङ्गा बह्माश्च पुष्टाश्च मागवास्ताप्रतिष्ठाकाः ॥ २
मेकलाः कोशला मद्रा दशार्णा निषवास्तवा ।

37 *) Śs वृद्धिवाच, Ks Ms निव, Ds Ds :
वृद्धिवाच(Ds नि)व Ks पद्माना, Ms-4 पद्मानि (for
पद्मानि) — *) Ks प्रमृता, Ds प्रमृता, Ts पद्माना
Ds पु (for च) Ks Ts स्रज, Ks प्रजा, Ds स्रजा
(for स्रज) — *) Ds च इति (for वदन्त्या) — *)
Ks B Ds Ds Ds १-११ सदाहवे, V1 Ds : Ts :
Gs Ms-4 वृद्ध रणे, Ts वृद्धर (Sup in कः), Gs :
वृद्ध वर, Ms वृद्ध रणे (for महामते)
38 Ds om (hapl) 38 and 8 17 1-4 Śs Bs
partly damaged — *) Śs Ks : [च]कर्णका(Ks
क)मानि, V1 B D (Ds om) Ts M कमानि, Ts
G कर्णानि Ks कमानिर्वाक्यानि (as), Ts कर्णाण्य
वर्णनीति — *) Ks विरदाश्च, Ks Ds Ms राज (for
राज) Ks तया, M दुरा (for दुर) Śs Ks विरदाश्च
१-११ च, Śs च वृद्धाण्य, Ks च वृद्धा दुर, Ts : G
विरदाणा रणे दुर — *) Ks वक्त्राणि Ks सुदीर्घाणि
वक्त्राणि (as), Ks सदाहवे च वक्त्राणि, Ds सदाहवे
वक्त्राणि, Ds सदाहवे वक्त्राणि, Ts विदीर्घाणि विरोधाणि,
Ts सदाहवे वक्त्राणि, Ts Gs : M वि(Gs च)दीर्घाणि
रोधाणि (Ms दी), Gs विदीर्घाणि स रोधाणि Gs onto
सदाहवे (as in text) — *) B Ds : ११ वरुण (for
प्रापुर्) Śs वरुण, Ds : वरुण, Ts वरुणा Ks
वरा, V1 B (except Bs) Ds Ds-4 Ts वरा, Ks
प्रापुर्दुर्दर्शता पर, Ds प्रापुर्दुर्दर्शता पर (as), Ts : G
M वरीणा वरुण — After 38, Śs Ks : 11a
134* तत्रैव वृद्धकर्णक देवाविचय उपपदे ।
अत्राविच प्रमुखा विदितामरणवत् ।
[(L 1) Śs वृद्धकर्ण, Ks वरुण — (L 2) Śs
"कर्णकर्ण, Ks वरुणवत्"]

Colophon om in Ds — Adhy name Ts
लेखपुत्र, Ms कर्णपुत्र — Day of Karna's
Generalship Śs प्रथमपुत्रविषये — Adhy no
(figures, words or both) Śs 16 (as in text),
Bs : : Ds Ds : 21, Ds 18, Ds 22, Ts : G Ms
64, Ts Ms-4 68 — Śloka no Ds 41

17

1 Ds om 1-4 (cf v 1 8 16 38) Before the
ref, Gs 11a श्रीकर्णाय वर — *) Ts : Gs वृद्धिवाच,
Gs : वृद्धिवाच, Ms-4 वृद्धिवाच Ts सदाहवे (for
महा) — *) Ds नोदिता, Ds नोदिन, Gs नोदिन
— *) Ts : Gs Ms-4 प्रदेसाह, Gs : Ms वृद्धिवाच
(for विवांसन्त) — *) Ts Gs : दुरा Ks वरुण (for
वर्णयु)
2 Ds om 2 (cf v 1 1) Bs partly damaged
— *) Ks वृद्धिवाच — *) Ks V1 B (Bs damaged)
D (Ds om) 8 वरुण Ds गजयोधिन — *) Gs :
वक्त्राणि(Gs का)च Gs वक्त्राणि, Ms वक्त्राणि
Gs वा(Gs वी)वक्त्रा, Ds Ds : वीवक्त्रा(Ds : वी)व,
Ms वृद्धा — *) Bs M वक्त्राणि, Ds वक्त्राणि
(for वक्त्राणि)
3 Ds om 3 (cf v 1 1) — *) Ks कोशला, V1
कोशला, Ds कोशला, Ts G कोशला Ts कोशला, Ts M
कोशला (for कोशला) Śs Ks Ds Ts कोशला, Ks कोशला,
Bs कोशला, Ts Gs Ms कोशला, Ts Ms-4 कोशला, Gs :
कोशला (for कोशला) Ds कोशला, Ts Gs : कोशला, Ts Gs
M कोशला (for महा), — *) Ks Ts दाक्षिणा, Ts Ms
दाक्षिणा Śs Ks : विरदा(Ks र)व V1 Ds : Ts च वे

[120]

anṅaḥ prathamato jajñe **suhmas** tathaiva ca |
punḍraḥ kaliṅgaś ca tathā bāleyaṁ kṣatram ucyate ||
(Harivaṁśa 31.34)³³

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
श्रीमन्महर्षि वेदव्यासप्रणीत

महाभारत-खिलभाग हरिवंश

(श्रीहरिवंशपुराण)
हिंदी-टीकासहित



टीकाकार—

पण्डित रामनारायणदत्त शास्त्री पाण्डेय 'राम'

प्रकाशक—गोविन्दभवन-कार्यालय, गीताप्रेस, गोरखपुर

सं० १९२४ से २०४९ तक
सं० १०५२ आठवाँ संस्करण

५०,०००
५,०००
योग ५५,०००

मूल्य—एक सौ रुपये

मुद्रक—गीताप्रेस, गोरखपुर—२७३००५
फोन : २३४४२१

भूतलपर बंशकी वृद्धि करनेवाले पाँच पुत्र उत्पन्न किये ॥ ३३ ॥

अङ्गः प्रथमतो जज्ञे यज्ञः सुहस्तयैव च ।

पुण्ड्रः कलिङ्गश्च तथा बालेयं क्षत्रमुच्यते ॥ ३४ ॥

उनमें सबसे पहले अङ्गकी उत्पत्ति हुई । तत्पश्चात् क्रमशः यज्ञः सुहस्तः पुण्ड्र तथा कलिङ्ग उत्पन्न हुए । ये सब लोग बालेय क्षत्रिय कहलाते हैं ॥ ३४ ॥

बालेया ब्राह्मणाश्चैव तस्य संशकरा भुवि ।

बलेस्तु प्रसूता वृत्ता वर्या प्रीतेन भारत ॥ ३५ ॥

महायोगिरामायुध कल्पस्य परिमाणतः ।

संज्ञाने वाप्यजेयसं धर्मे वैव प्रधानता ॥ ३६ ॥

त्रैलोक्यदर्शनं वैव प्राधान्यं प्रसवे तथा ।

बले चाप्रतिमत्वं वै धर्मसर्वार्थदर्शनम् ॥ ३७ ॥

बहुरो मितस्तान् प्रणोस्ति च स्थापयिता भुवि ।

इत्युक्तो विमुग्धा राजा बलिः शान्तिं परो ययौ ॥ ३८ ॥

बलिके कुलमें बालेय ब्राह्मण भी हुए, जो इस भूतलपर उनके वंशकी वृद्धि करनेवाले थे । भरतमन्त्रेण । प्रजापतिने बलिवर प्रसन्न होकर उन्हें मिश्राश्रित कर दिये थे—गुप्त महा-योगी होओगे, हुम्हारी आयु एक कल्पकी होगी, तुम पुत्रमें अजेय होओगे, धर्ममें हुम्हारी प्रधानता होगी, तुम तीनों लोकोंकी देखभाल करोगे (अर्थात् तुम तीनों लोकोंकी सभी बातों पर्यवेक्षकी भौति देखोगे) हुम्हारी संवत्सरी षष्ठ समशी जायगी, यलमें हुम्हारी समानता करनेवाला कोई न होगा, तुम धर्मसर्वार्थके ज्ञाता होओगे तथा भूतलपर चारों ओरकी निरन्तरगममें रखकर उन्हीं सर्वार्थोंके भीतर स्थापित करोगे । भगवान् प्रजापतिने ऐसा कहनेपर राजा बलिकी वृद्धि शान्ति मिली ॥ ३५-३८ ॥

तस्य ते तनयाः सर्वे क्षेत्रज्ञा मुनिपुङ्गवाश्च ।

सम्भूताः दीर्घतपसो सुवैष्णवाः महीजनाः ॥ ३९ ॥

उनके ये सभी पुत्र क्षेत्रज्ञ थे । मुनिवर दीर्घतपस्वियों रानी सुवैष्णवोंके गर्भसे प्रसूत हुए थे । उनका यल महान् था ॥

बलिस्तानभिषिच्येह यज्ञं पुत्रानकल्पयान् ।

कृतार्थः सोऽपि योगात्मा योगमाभित्य स प्रभुः ॥ ४० ॥

अधुर्यः सर्वभूतानां कालप्रपेक्षी चरन्निधि ।

कालेन महता राजन् स्वैः च स्थानमुपागमत् ॥ ४१ ॥

राजा बलिने उन पाँचों निष्ठाप पुत्रोंको विभिन्न राज्यों-पर अभिषिक्त करके अपनेकी कृतार्थ माना । उनका मन सब योगमें लगा रहता था । ये योगका आश्रय ले समस्त प्राणिपौके लिये अजेय हो गये थे । कालकी प्रतीक्षा करते हुए सर्वत्र विचरते थे । राजन् । दीर्घकालने पश्चात् उन्हें अपना स्थान (सुतललोक) उपलब्ध हुआ ॥ ४०-४१ ॥

तेषां जनपदाः पञ्च यज्ञा यज्ञाः ससुहृत्काः ।

कलिङ्गाः पुण्ड्रकाश्चैव मज्जाक्षत्रियस्य मे शृणु ॥ ४२ ॥

उनके पाँच पुत्रोंके अधिकारमें जो जनपद थे, उनके नाम इस प्रकार हैं—अङ्ग, यज्ञ, सुहस्त, कलिङ्ग और पुण्ड्र । अब हम मुझसे अङ्गकी पंतागोंका वर्णन सुनो ॥ ४२ ॥

अङ्गपुत्रो महाभासीव राजेन्द्रो दधिवाहनः ।

दधिवाहनपुत्रस्तु राजा द्विदियोऽभवत् ॥ ४३ ॥

अङ्गके पुत्र महान् राजाधिराज दधिवाहन थे और दधि-वाहनके पुत्र राजा द्विदिय हुए ॥ ४३ ॥

पुत्रो द्विदियस्यासीच्छक्रतुत्पराक्रमः ।

विश्वान् धर्मरथो नाम तस्य क्षित्ररथः सुतः ॥ ४४ ॥

द्विदियके पुत्र इन्द्रतुल्य पराक्रमी और विद्वान् थे ।

उनका नाम धर्मरथ था । धर्मरथके पुत्र क्षित्ररथ हुए ॥ ४४ ॥

तेन क्षित्ररथेनाप तदा विष्णुपदे गिरी ।

यजता सह रामेण सौमः पीतो महात्मना ॥ ४५ ॥

राजा क्षित्ररथ स्व विष्णुपद पर्यन्तपर यह करते थे, उस समय उन महात्मना नौगने इन्द्रके साथ बैठकर छेमपात किया था ॥ ४५ ॥

अथ क्षित्ररथस्यापि पुत्रो दधारथोऽभवत् ।

छेमपाद इति यपातो यस्य शागता सुताभवत् ॥ ४६ ॥

क्षित्ररथके पुत्र दधारथ हुए, गिनका दूधरा नाम छेम-पाद था तथा शान्ता गिनकी पुत्री थी ॥ ४६ ॥

तस्य दादारथिर्धर्मस्तुतको महायथाः ।

शृण्वशृङ्गमसाधेन जज्ञे कुलविचर्धनः ॥ ४७ ॥

उन छेमपाद या दधारथके पुत्र महायथास्वी धीर चतु-रक्ष हुए, ओ शृण्वशृङ्ग मुनिकी कृपासे उत्पन्न हुए थे । चतुरक्ष अपने कुलकी वृद्धि करनेवाले थे ॥ ४७ ॥

चतुरक्षस्य पुत्रस्तु पृथुलाक्ष इति स्मृतः ।

पृथुलाक्षसुतो राजा चण्वो नाम महायथाः ॥ ४८ ॥

चतुरक्षके पुत्र पृथुलाक्ष करे गये हैं । पृथुलाक्षके पुत्र महायथास्वी राजा चण्व हुए ॥ ४८ ॥

चण्वस्य तु पुरी चण्वा या मालिन्यभवत् पुत्रः ।

पूर्णभद्रमसाधेन हर्यङ्कोऽस्य सुतोऽभवत् ॥ ४९ ॥

चण्वकी राजधानी चण्वा थी, ओ पहले मालिन्यके नामसे प्रसिद्ध थी । चण्वके पुत्र हर्यङ्ग हुए, ओ पूर्णभद्र नामक मुनिप्री कृपासे उत्पन्न हुए थे ॥ ४९ ॥

ततो वैभाण्डकिस्तस्य वारणं शकवारणम् ।

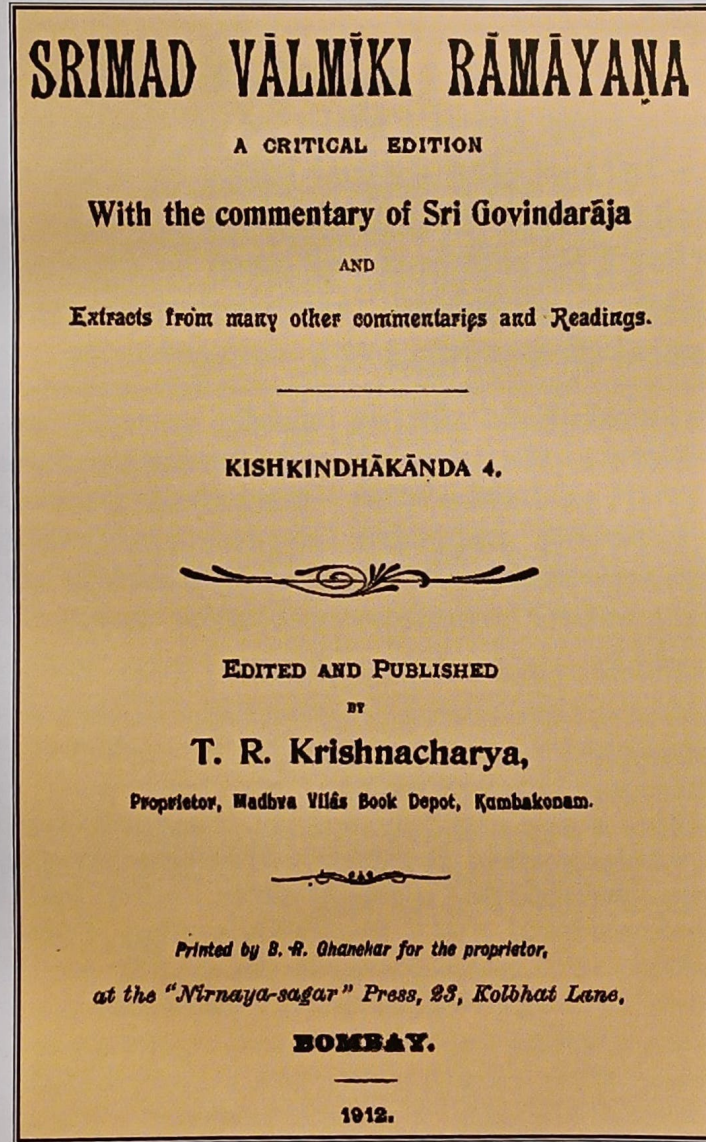
अथतारयामास महीं मन्त्रैर्वाहनमुत्तमम् ॥ ५० ॥

विभाण्डकपुत्र शृण्वशृङ्गने हर्यङ्गकी सवारीके लिये इन्द्र-के उत्तम वाहन गजराज वैरावतकी मन्त्रैर्वाहन स्वर्गसे भूतल-पर उतारा था ॥ ५० ॥

Valmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, another great epic of Indian literary heritage, also mentions Puṇḍra and Vaṅga. Though the legend of Rāma reaches back to the Veda, the epic appears to have been authored in the 3rd century BCE. It is probable that it had its present extent and contents towards the close of the 2nd century CE.³⁴ The verses in the text are as follows.

brahmamālān videhāṁś ca mālavān kāsīkosālān |
 māgadhāṁś ca mahāgrāmān **puṇḍrāṇ vaṅgāṁś** tathaiva ca ||
 (Rāmāyaṇa 4.40.21)³⁵

anvikṣya daṇḍakāraṇyaṁ saparvatanadīguham |
 nadīm godāvarīm caiva sarvam evānupaśyata |
 tathaivāndhrāṁś ca **puṇḍrāṁś** ca colān pāṇḍyān sakeralān ||
 (Rāmāyaṇa 4.41.12)³⁶



³⁴ Cf. Banerjee, op. cit., p. 294.

³⁵ Krishnacharya (ed.), *Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Kishkindhākāṇḍa*, p. 159.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

सर्गः ४०]

श्रीमद्रोविन्दराजीयव्याख्यासमलंकृतम् ।

१५९

काममेवामिदं कार्यं विदितं मेम तत्त्वतः ॥ तथापि तु यथातत्त्वमाज्ञापयितुमर्हसि ॥ ८ ॥
 इति ब्रुवाणं सुग्रीवं रामो देशरथात्मजः ॥ बाहुभ्यां संपरिष्वज्य इदं वचनमब्रवीत् ॥ ९ ॥
 ज्ञायतां मेम वैदेही यदि जीवति वा न वा ॥ सच देशो महाप्राज्ञं यस्मिन्वसति रावणः ॥ १० ॥
 अधिगम्य तु वैदेहीं निलयं रावणस्य च ॥ प्राप्तकालं विधास्यामि तस्मिन्काले सह त्वया ॥ ११ ॥
 नाहमस्मिन्प्रभुः कार्ये वानरेश न लक्ष्मणः ॥ त्वमस्य हेतुः कार्यस्य प्रभुश्च पुत्रगेश्वर ॥ १२ ॥
 त्वमेवाज्ञापय विभो मम कार्यविनिश्चयम् ॥ त्वं हि जानासि यत्कार्यं मम वीर न संशयः ॥ १३ ॥
 सुहृद्वितीयो विक्रान्तः प्राज्ञः कालविशेषवित् ॥ भवानस्मद्विते युक्तः सुकृतार्थोर्वचिचमः ॥ १४ ॥
 एवमुक्तस्तु सुग्रीवो विनतं नाम यूथपम् ॥ अग्रवीद्रामसामिध्ये लक्ष्मणस्य च धीमतः ॥
 शैलामं मेधनिर्घोषमूर्जितं पुत्रगेश्वरः ॥ १५ ॥
 सोमैर्सूर्यात्मजैः सार्धं वानरैर्वानरोत्तम ॥ देशकालनयैर्युक्तः कार्यकार्यविनिश्चये ॥ १६ ॥
 वृतः शतसहस्रेण वानराणां तरस्विनाम् ॥ अधिगच्छ दिशं पूर्वां सशैलवनकाननाम् ॥ १७ ॥
 तत्र सीतां च वैदेहीं निलयं रावणस्य च ॥ मार्गध्वं गिरिर्ध्वजेषु वनेषु च नदीषु च ॥ १८ ॥
 नदीं भागीरथीं रम्यां सरयू कौशिकीं तथा ॥ कालिन्दीं यमुनां रम्यां यामुनं च महागिरिम् ॥ १९ ॥
 सरस्वतीं च सिन्धुं च क्षोणं मणिनिभोदकम् ॥ महीं कालमहीं चैवं शैलकाननशोभिताम् ॥ २० ॥
 ब्रह्ममालान्विदेहांश्च मालवान्काशिकोसलान् ॥ मागधांश्च महाग्रामान्पुण्ड्रान्वान्वान्तैव च ॥
 पंचेनं कोशकाराणां भूमिं च रजताकराम् ॥ २१ ॥

कालोचितं ॥ ७ ॥ एषां कार्यं एभिः कर्तव्यं । मम विदितं मया विदितं ॥ ८—१३ ॥ सुहृद्विनीत इति च पाठः ॥ १४—१५ ॥ कार्यकार्यविषये विनिश्चये देशकालनयैः देशोचितनीतिभिः कालोचितनीतिभिः अर्थः । देशकालानुगुणनयप्रवर्तनं कर्तव्यमित्यर्थः ॥ १६—१८ ॥ नदीमित्यादि रजताकरामित्यन्त-मेकं वाक्यं । प्राप्येति शेषः । ततस्ततः सीतां मृग-

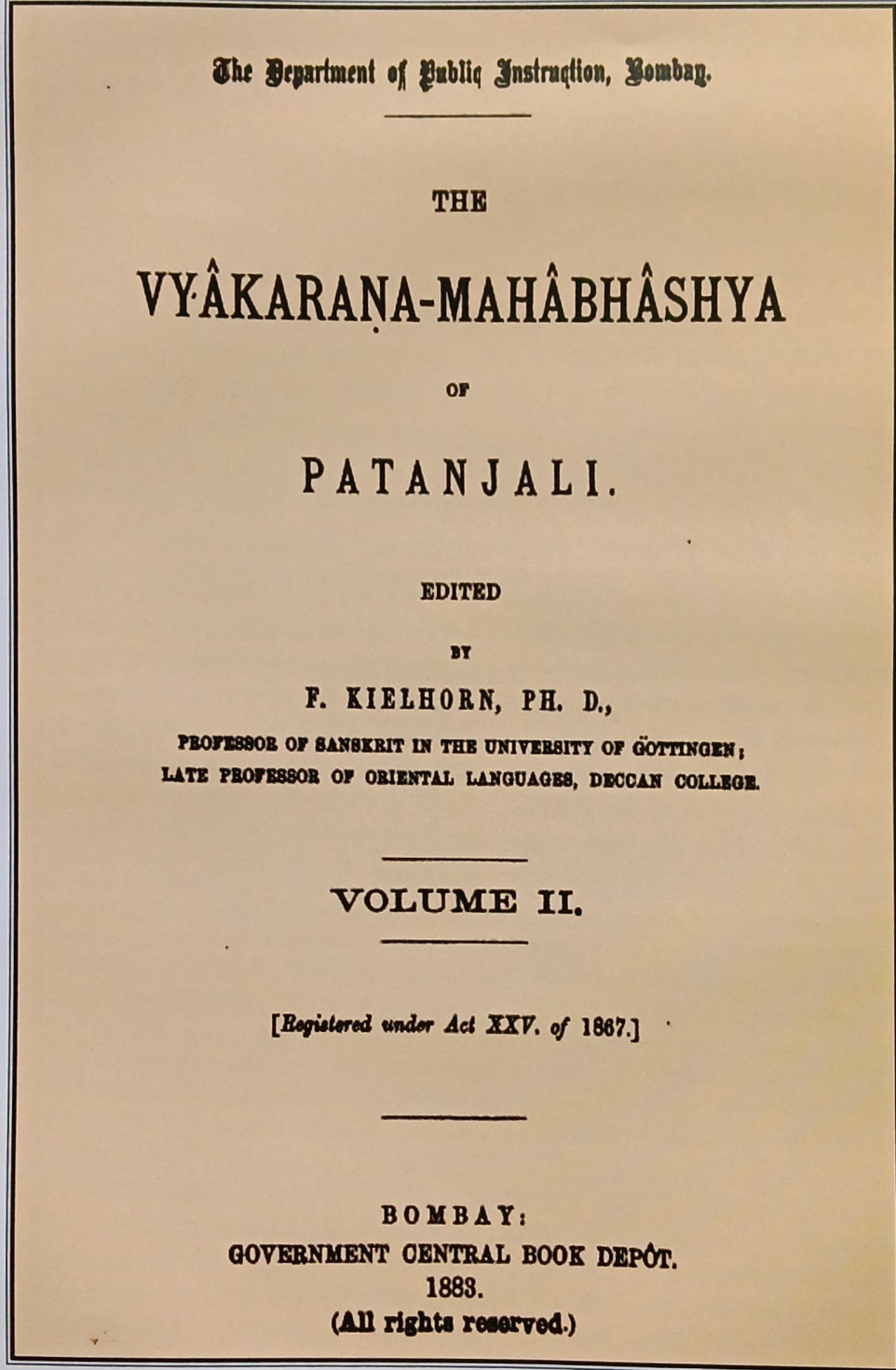
यन्निर्भवद्भिः भागीरथ्यादिकं प्राप्य एतत् पूर्वोक्तं सर्वं । विचेतव्यमिति संबन्धः । अत्रेवमवधेयं । शरावती नाम काचिन्नदी हिमवद्विन्ध्यमध्यदेशे वल्काकारेण प्रवहति । तदपेक्षया प्राचीविगिदानीं विचेयत्वे-नोच्यते नतु किष्किन्धापेक्षया नापि मेवपेक्षयेति । यामुनं महागिरिं यमुनासंबन्धिनं पर्वतं । महावयो देशविशेषाः । मागधान् मगधदेशान् । महाग्रामान्

स० रावणनिवासउपलब्धक्षेत्रकार्यं किं रावणो हन्तव्यउत्तेहानेत्यव्यवस्थितआह—अधिगम्येति । अधिगम्य विज्ञाय । अनन्तरं तत्कालोचितं विधास्यामि ॥ ११ ॥ शि० यस्मिन्देशे रावणो वसति स देशः वैदेहीजीवति न वा इति च यद्विस्मिन्काले ज्ञायतां त-स्मिन्काले वैदेहीमधिगम्य रावणस्य निलयं प्राप्तकालं विध्वंस्य साश्रयमित्यर्थः । श्लोकद्वयमेकान्वयि ॥ १०—११ ॥ ती० सुहृद्वितीयः सुहृद्वितीयोऽपेक्षया द्वितीयत्वं ॥ ननु मेरोः पूर्वदिगवस्थितो दयाचलपर्यन्तमन्वेष्टुं प्रेषितान्वानराः प्रतिमेरोर्दक्षिणदिगवस्थितभागीरथ्या-दिनदीपर्वताद्यन्वेषणविधानं कथमुपपद्यत इति चेत् हेमाचलविन्ध्यमध्यदेशवर्त्यायावर्तपेक्षया प्राच्यादिविभागो विवक्षितः । ननु मे-रुपेक्षया । स्वावस्थितमाल्यवदपेक्षया वेति न दोषः ॥ १४ ॥ ति० विह्वः लमिति शेषः ॥ १६ ॥ ति० निलयं रावणस्य निलयं स्थानं । यद्वा चतुर्दिक्षुरावणवासस्थानमनेन सूचितं ॥ १८ ॥ ति० मार्गध्वमितिसामान्यतो नियोगः । विशेषेणाह—नदीमित्यादि द्वितीयांताभां प्राप्येति शेषः ॥ यामुनो गिरिः यमुनोत्पत्तिस्थानभूतः कालिन्दिगिरिः ॥ १९ ॥ ति० महीकालमहौनशौ ॥ २० ॥ ति० कोशकाराणां भूमिं कौशिकतन्तुत्पादकजन्तुत्पत्तिस्थानभूतां भूमिं । रजताकरां रजतखनिं ॥ २१ ॥

[पा०] १ च. झ. ज. काममेवमिदं. २ क. ख. प. वीर. ३ क. ड.—ट. यथायुक्तं. ४ क. ख. ड.—ट. तथा. ५ ग. बुद्धिपतावरः. ६ क. ग.—ट. सौम्य. ७ ख. वीर. ८ ग. ड.—ट. वानरेन्द्र. ९ ख. त्वमेव. १० छ. झ. मेकार्थं. ११ ख. छ. प्राप्तकाल. १२ ग. सकृताद्यौ. छ. झ. सुहृदासौ. १३ क. ड. च. ज. मेधनिर्घोषजीमूतं. १४ ख. छ. झ. ज. ट. पुत्रगेश्वर. १५ छ. झ. म. ट. सूर्यनिभैः. १६ छ. झ. ट. विज्ञः कार्य. १७ ड. च. ज. म. ततः. १८ ख. च.—ट. दुर्गेषु. १९ ड. नदेवुच.

[पा०] १ क. छ. झ. ट. वृष्टिकावैव. २ क. ख. वज्रकलित्रांघ. ३. छ. झ. ञ. ट. मत्स्यकलित्रांघ. ४. ञ. ज. वत्सक-
लित्रांघ. १ क.—घ. काशिकांघ. ४ ख. तयैवच. ५ ख. अन्विध्व. ६ ख. वेति. ७ ग. ड. च. ज. ञ. पश्यच. ८ ग. च—
ट. पाण्ड्यांघकेरानु. ९ क. अपोमुखध. १० ख. पुषितपादपः. ११ घ.—ट. सुचन्दन. १२ झ. ट. सखिलाशयां. घ. स-
खिलाशुनां. १३ ख.—ट. विह्वामसरो. १४ क.—ट. महौजसः. १५ ख. ग. महाप्राहां. १६ ड.—ट. वनैचित्रैः. १७ छ. झ.
प्रच्छन्नदीपवारिणी. ट. प्रच्छन्नदीपमालिनी. १८ छ. ग. ड.—ट. सुवटीकान्तं. १९ क. मणिनिषेवितं. २० ड.—ज. ख.
ततो. २१ ड. च. ज. ञ. ट. चित्रसानुगतः. झ. चित्रसानुनगः. ग. चित्रनानावनः. २२ घ. श्रीमाद्रगेन्द्रः. २३ क.—ट. फुलैः.
२४ ख. ग. गन्धर्वयक्ष. २५ घ.—ट. शोभितं. २६ क. चारणगन्धर्वैः. २७ ड. ज.—ट. सुमनोरमं. २८ ख. समुपेति.

In his *Mahābhāṣya*, commentary on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Patañjali, appears to have been a contemporary of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga belonging to 2nd century BCE,³⁷ while explaining the Pāṇini rule *viṣayo deśe* (4.2.52) mentions the name of Puṇḍra as one of the examples of *janapada*.³⁸



37 Cf. Banerjee, op. cit., p. 79.

38 For text Kielhorn, *The Vaiyākaraṇā-Mahābhāṣya*, Vol. II, p. 282.

खलगोरयात् ॥ ४ । २ । ५० ॥

इनित्रकव्यचक्ष्व ॥ ४ । २ । ५१ ॥

खलादिभ्य इनिः ॥ १ ॥

खलादिभ्य इनिर्वक्तव्यः । खलिनी ककिनी कुन्दुभिनीति ॥

विषयो देशे ॥ ४ । २ । ५२ ॥

विषयाभिधाने जनपदे लुम्बहुवचनविषयात् ॥ १ ॥

विषयाभिधाने जनपदे लुम्बहुवचनविषयाद्वक्तव्यः* । अङ्गानां विषयो ञ्ज्ञाः ।
पङ्गाः दृष्टाः पुण्ड्राः ॥

गान्धार्यादिभ्यो वा ॥ २ ॥

गान्धार्यादिभ्यो वेति वक्तव्यम् । गान्धारः गान्धारयः । वासातः वसातयः ।
शैवः शिवयः ॥

राजन्यादिभ्यो वा वुष् ॥ ३ ॥

राजन्यादिभ्यो वा वुष्वाक्तव्यः । राजन्याः राजन्यकः । शैव्यातवाः शैव्या-
तयकः ॥

वैल्ववनादिभ्यो नित्यम् ॥ ४ ॥

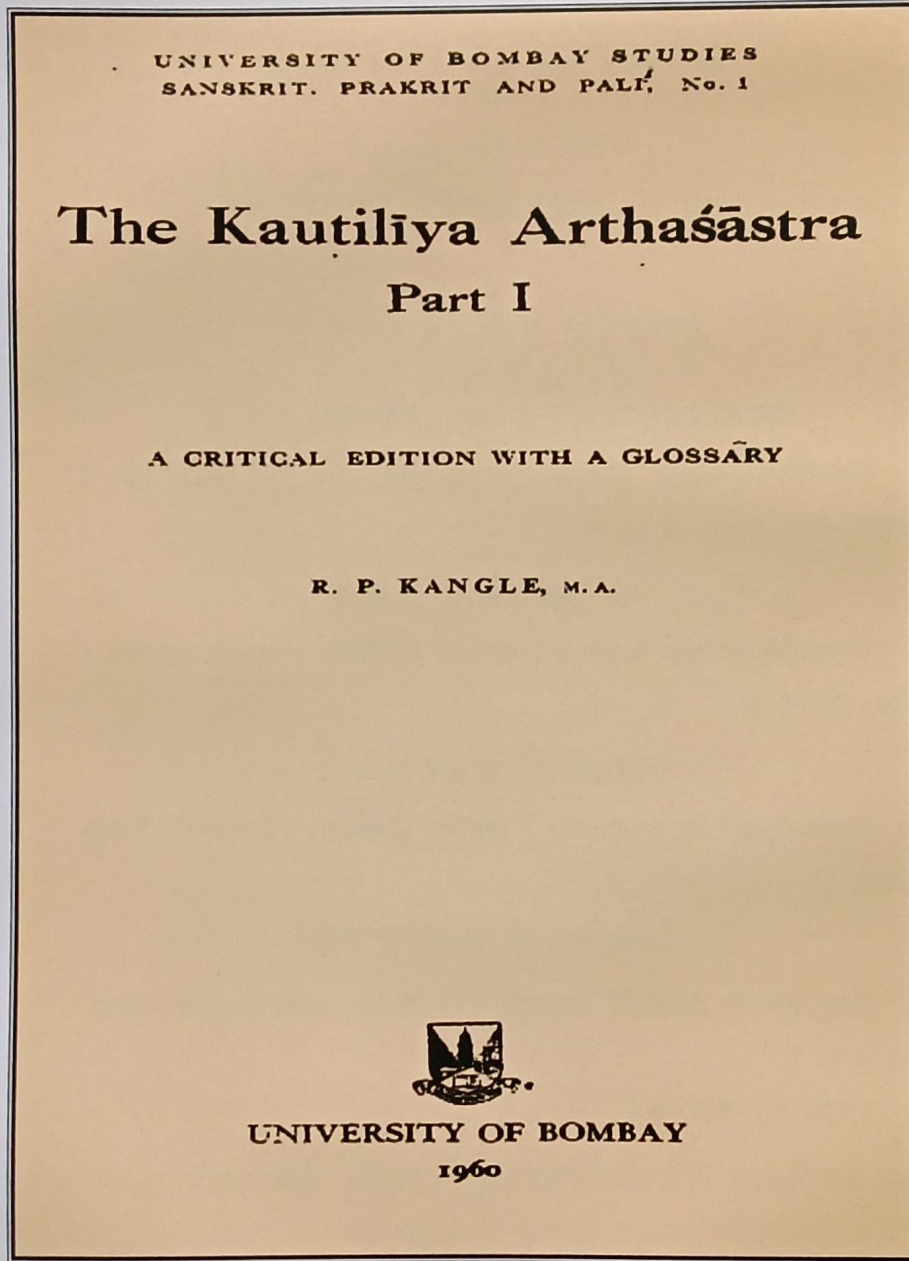
वैल्ववनादिभ्यो नित्यमिति वक्तव्यम् । वैल्ववनकः आम्बरीषपुत्रकः आत्म-
कामेवकः ॥

तत्सर्गं बहु वक्तव्यम् ।

न वाभिधेयस्य निवासविषयत्वाभिवासविवक्षायां लुम्बिषयविवक्षायां
प्रत्ययः ॥ ५ ॥

न वा वक्तव्यम् । किं कारणम् । अभिधेयस्य निवासविषयत्वात् । यदभिधेयं
स निवासविषयविषयः । अभिधेयस्य निवासविषयत्वाभिवासविवक्षायां लुम्बिषयविव-

Kauṭilya, ascribed to be the author of oldest extant work on politics and statecraft entitled *Arthaśāstra*, belonged to a period not earlier than 300 BCE as is suggested by P.V. Kane.³⁹ According to Patrick Olivelle the date of Śāstric redaction of *Arthaśāstra* would be around 175-300 CE.⁴⁰ In the chapter entitled *Kośapraveśyaratnaparīkṣā* in *Adhyakṣapracāra Adhikaraṇa* Kauṭilya praises the cloth materials of Puṇḍra and Vaṅga as well.⁴¹ In chapter 13, further, of the same *Adhikaraṇa* Kauṭilya mentioned about silver from Gauḍa.⁴²



39 Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. 1, p. 99.

40 Olivelle, *King, Governance and Law*, p. 31.

41 Cf. Kangle (ed.), *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*, Part I, p. 55; for English translation Olivelle, *ibid.*, p. 126.

42 For text cf. Kangle, *op. cit.*, p. 58; for English translation Olivelle, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

वाङ्गकं श्वेतं रत्नगंधं दुकूलम् । १०२ । पौण्ड्रकं श्यामं मणिस्निग्धम् । १०३ ।
सौवर्णकुण्ड्यकं सूर्यवर्णं मणिस्निग्धोदकवानं चतुरश्रवानं व्यामिश्रवानं च । १०४ ।
एतेषामेकांशुकमध्यर्धद्वित्रिचतुरंशुकमिति । १०५ ।

तेन काशिकं पौण्ड्रकं च क्षौमं व्याख्यातम् । १०६ ।

मागधिका पौण्ड्रका सौवर्णकुण्ड्यका च पत्रोर्णा । १०७ । नागवृक्षो लिङ्कुचो
बकुलो वटश्च योनयः । १०८ । पीतिका नागवृक्षिका । १०९ । गोधूमवर्णा लैकुची
। ११० । श्वेता बाकुली । १११ । शेषा नवनीतवर्णा । ११२ । तासां सौवर्णकुण्ड्यका
श्रेष्ठा । ११३ ।

तथा कौशेयं चीनपट्टाश्च चीनभूमिजा व्याख्याताः । ११४ ।

माधुरमापरान्तकं कालिङ्गकं काशिकं वाङ्गकं वात्सकं माहिषकं च कार्पासिकं
श्रेष्ठम् । इति । ११५ ।

अतः परेषां रत्नानां प्रमाणं मूल्यलक्षणम् ।

जातिं रूपं च जानीयान्निधानं नवकर्म च ॥ ११६ ॥

पुराणप्रतिसंस्कारं कर्म गुह्यमुपस्करान् ।

देशकालपरीभोगं हिंसाणां च प्रतिक्रियाम् ॥ ११७ ॥

इत्यध्यक्षप्रचारे द्वितीयेऽधिकरणे कोशप्रवेश्यरत्नपरीक्षा एकादशोऽध्यायः ।

आदितो द्वाविंशतः ।

१२

[त्रिंशं प्रकरणम् - आकरकर्मान्तप्रवर्तनम्]

आकराध्यक्षः शुल्बधातुशास्त्ररसपाकमणिरागज्ञस्तज्ज्ञसखो वा तज्ज्ञातकर्मकरो-
पकरणसंपन्नः किट्टमूषाङ्गारभस्मलिङ्गं वाऽऽकरं भूतपूर्वमभूतपूर्वं वा भूमिप्रस्तररस-
धातुमत्यर्थवर्णगौरवमुग्रगन्धरसं परीक्षेत । १ ।

पर्वतानामभिज्ञातोदेशानां बिलगुहोपत्यकालयनगूढस्वातेष्वन्तःप्रस्यन्दिनो जम्बू-
चूततालफलपकहरिद्राभेदगुडहरितालमनःशिलाक्षौद्रहिङ्गुलुकपुण्डरीकशुकमयूरपत्रवर्णाः
सवर्णोदकौषधिपर्यन्ताश्चिह्ना विशदा भारिकाश्च रसाः क्वाञ्चनिकाः । २ । अप्सु

105 G अर्धद्वित्रि. 107 M_{1.8} पत्रोर्णा. Cb पत्रोर्णाः, 116 M_{1.3} प्रमाणमूल्य-
117 G₁ M उपस्करात् (corr. in M₂). Colophon Cb कोशप्रवेश्य-.

2. 12

1 G M तज्ज्ञसखो, [Cb Cp]. - G₁ तज्ज्ञात-. 2 m p -ल्यन्तिगूढ-. - G M om -गुड-,
[M₂ pl.]. - G₁ M om. -मनःशिला-, - Cb om. -मयूर-.

2. 12. 36]

कौटिलीयेऽर्थशास्त्रे

५८

खनिभ्यो द्वादशविधं धातुं पण्यं च संदरेत् ।
 एवं सर्वेषु पण्येषु स्थापयेन्मुखसंग्रहम् ॥ ३६ ॥
 आकरप्रभवः कोशः कोशादण्डः प्रजायते ।
 पृथिवी कोशदण्डाभ्यां प्राप्यते कोशमूपणा ॥ ३७ ॥
 इत्यप्यक्षमचारे द्वितीयेऽधिकरणे आकरकर्मान्तप्रवर्तनम् द्वादशोऽध्यायः ।
 आदित्यस्यस्तिशः ।

१३

[एकत्रिंशं प्रकरणम् - अश्वशालायां सुवर्णाध्यक्षः]

सुवर्णाध्यक्षः सुवर्णरजतकर्मान्तानामसंवन्धावेशनचतुःशालामेकद्वारामश्वशालां
 कारयेत् । १ । विशिखामध्ये सौवर्णिकं शिल्पवन्तममिजातं प्रात्ययिकं च स्थाप-
 येत् । २ ।

जाम्बूनदं शातकुम्भं हाटकं वैणवं शृङ्गशुक्तिजं जातरूपं रसविद्धमाकरोद्गतं च
 सुवर्णम् । ३ । किञ्चलकवर्णं मृदु स्निग्धमनादि भ्राजिष्णु च श्रेष्ठम्, रक्तपीतकं मध्य-
 मम्, रक्तमधरम् । ४ ।

श्रेष्ठानां पाण्डु श्वेतं चाप्राप्तकम् । ५ । तद्येनाप्राप्तकं तच्चतुर्गुणेन सीसेन शोध-
 येत् । ६ । सीसान्वयेन मिद्यमानं शुष्कपटलैर्ध्मापयेत् । ७ । रुक्षत्वाद्भिद्यमानं तैल-
 गोमये निपेचयेत् । ८ ।

आकरोद्गतं सीसान्वयेन मिद्यमानं पाकपत्राणि कृत्वा गण्डिकासु कुट्टयेत्,
 कदलीवज्रकन्दकल्के वा निपेचयेत् । ९ ।

तुत्योद्गतं गौडिकं काम्बुकं चाक्रवालिकं च रूप्यम् । १० । श्वेतं स्निग्धं मृदु
 च श्रेष्ठम् । ११ । विपर्यये स्फोटनं च दुष्टम् । १२ । तत्सीसचतुर्भागेन शोधयेत्
 । १३ । उद्गतचूलिकमच्छं भ्राजिष्णु दधिवर्णं च शुद्धम् । १४ ।

शुद्धस्यैको हारिद्रस्य सुवर्णो वर्णकः । १५ । ततः शुल्बकाकण्युत्तरापसारिता आ-
 चतुःसीमान्तादिति षोडश वर्णकाः । १६ ।

सुवर्णं पूर्वं निकष्य पश्चाद्द्वर्णिकां निकषयेत् । १७ । समरागलेखमनिम्नोन्नते देशे
 निकषितम्, परिमृदितं परिलीढं नखान्तराद्वा गैरिकेणावचूर्णितमुपधि विद्यात् । १८ ।

2. 13

2 M₂ v1, शीलवन्तम् (for शिल्प). 3 Cb शृङ्गशुक्तिः. - M रसविद्धम् (corr. in M₂), M₂
 v1 रसविद्धम्. 4 G M अनुनादि, [Cb]. 9 G M कन्दलीवज्रः, [em. of 2.12.9] 10 G₁
 काममलं कम्बु, M कामलुकं, P काममलं कम्बुकं, [Cb Cp] 14 M अर्थ (for अच्छं) (corr. in
 M₂). 18 M₁ 8 'मुपधि.

Reference to silver from Gauḍa in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya

King, Governance,
and Law in
Ancient India
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A New Annotated Translation by
PATRICK OLIVELLE

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CLOTH

⁹⁶Woolen textiles may be undyed, completely dyed, or partially dyed;* and they may be knitted, dappled by weaving, patchwork, or with cut-off threads.* ⁹⁸Blanket, Kauçapaka, Kulamitikā, Saumitikā, horse's saddle cloth, colored blanket, Talicchaka, armor cloth, Paristoma, and Samantabhadra*—these are the kinds of woolen textiles. ⁹⁹Those that are slick and looking wet, and those that are fine and soft are the best.

¹⁰⁰Those from Nepal are the Bhiṅgiś, which are black and manufactured by combining eight woven strands, and the Apasāraka, which keep off the rain.*

¹⁰¹Those made from animal hair are Sampuṭikā, Caturaśrikā, Lambarā, Kaṭavānaka, Prāvaraka, and Sattalikā.*

¹⁰²Dukūla* from the Vaṅgas is white and smooth; ¹⁰³that from the Puṇḍras is dark and smooth like a gem; ¹⁰⁴that from Suvarṇakuḍya has the color of the sun, is smooth like a gem with a watery weave, a square weave, and a mixed weave.* ¹⁰⁵Among these, there are textiles woven with one, one and a half, two, three, and four yarns.

¹⁰⁶The above also explains linen from Kāśī and the Puṇḍras.

¹⁰⁷"Leaf-wool" silk* comes from Magadha, Puṇḍra, and Suvarṇakuḍya.

¹⁰⁸Their sources are the Nāga-vṛkṣa, the Likuca, the Bakula, and the banyan.

¹⁰⁹Silk from the Nāga-vṛkṣa is yellow; ¹¹⁰that from Likuca is wheat-colored; ¹¹¹that from Bakula is white; ¹¹²and the last has the color of new butter. ¹¹³Of these, the silk from Suvarṇakuḍya is the best.

¹¹⁴The above also explains Kauśeya silk and Cīna cloth coming from the land of Cīna.*

¹¹⁵Cotton textiles from Madhurā, the Aparāntas, the Kāśī, the Vaṅgas, the Vatsas, and the Mahiṣas are the best.

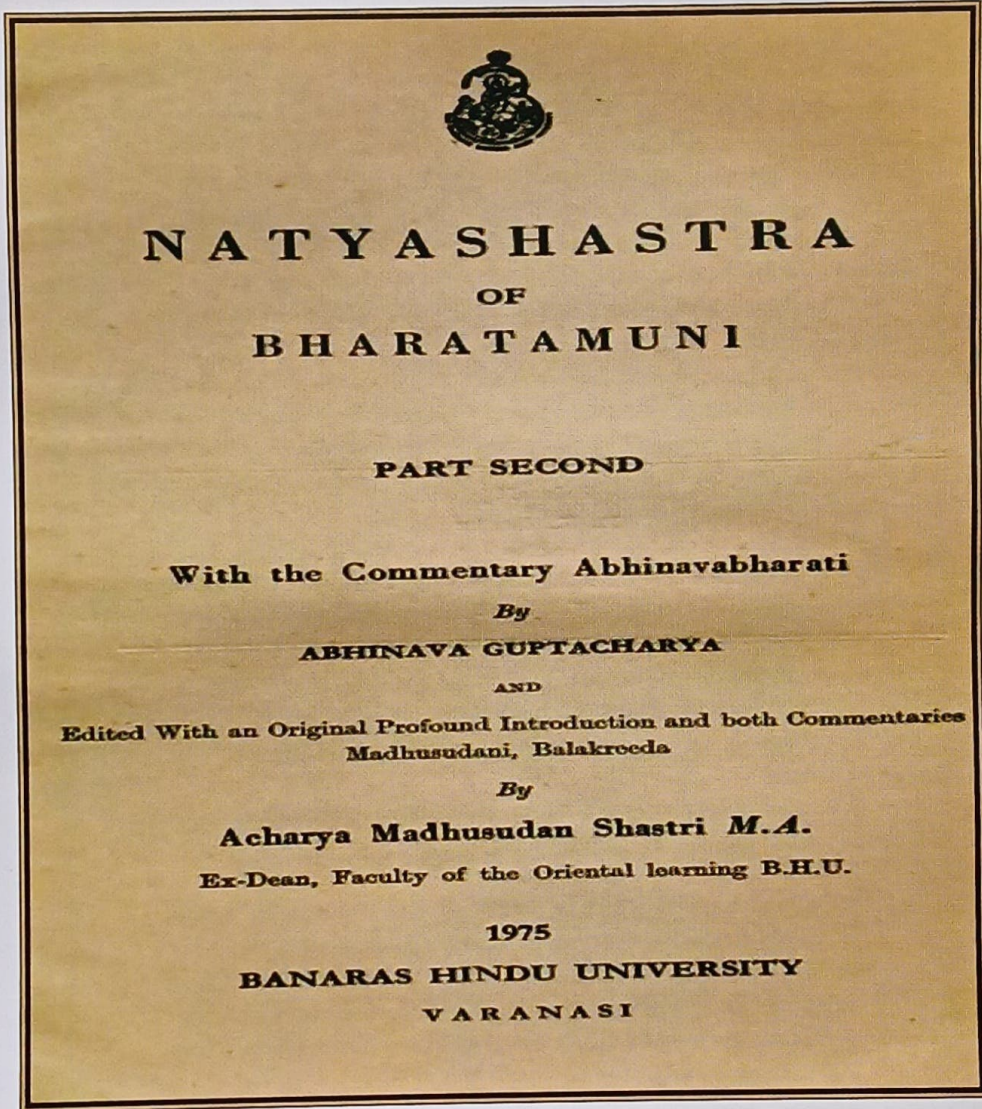
¹¹⁶⁻¹¹⁷With regard to precious stones other than these, he should be conversant with their sizes, prices, characteristics, varieties, and appearance, as also their proper storage, the manufacture of new ones, the repair of old ones, secret treatments, tools, their use at the proper place and time, and remedies against things that may cause them harm.

THAT CONCLUDES THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER: "EXAMINATION OF PRECIOUS STONES TO BE RECEIVED INTO THE TREASURY" OF THE SECOND BOOK: "ON THE ACTIVITIES OF SUPERINTENDENTS."

English translation of respective passages in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya

Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, belonging to a period between 200 BCE and 200 CE,⁴³ in its chapter 14 entitled *Pravṛttidharmavyaṅjaka* speaks that,

Eastern [countries such as] Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Vatsa, Oḍhra (Oḍra), Magadha, Puṇḍra, Nepāla, Aṁtargira, Bahirgira, Plavaṅgama, Malada, Mallavartaka, Brahmottara, Bhārgava, Mārgava, Prāgyōtiṣa, Pulinda, Videha and Tāmralipta adopt the Local Usage known as the Oḍhra-Māgadhi.⁴⁴



⁴³ Gonda (ed.), op. cit., Vol III, Fasc. 1, p. 54.

⁴⁴ Ghosh, *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 1, p. 243; for Sanskrit text cf. Madhusudan Shastri (ed.), *Natyashastra of Bharatamuni*, p. 1131.

दाशार्णास्त्रैपुराश्चैव तथा वै मार्तिकावताः ।
 कुर्वन्त्यावन्तिकीमेते प्रवृत्तिं नित्यमेव तु ॥ ४२ ॥
 सात्वती कैशिकी चैव वृत्तिमेपां समाश्रिता ।
 भवेत् प्रयोगो नाट्येऽत्र स तु कार्यः प्रयोक्तृभिः ॥ ४३ ॥
 अङ्गा वङ्गाः कलिङ्गाश्च वत्साश्चैवोद्मागधाः ।
 पौण्ड्रा नेपालकाश्चैव अन्तिर्गिरवहिर्गिराः ॥ ४४ ॥
 तथा प्लवङ्गमाहेन्द्रमलदा मल्लवर्तकाः ।
 ब्रह्मोत्तरप्रभृतयो मार्गवा मार्गवास्तथा ॥ ४५ ॥

अभिनवभारती

देशोपसंग्रहणार्थः कवीनाम् । एवमुत्तरत्र ॥४१॥ नित्यमेव त्विति अनादिर्यं देश-
 भेदेन चित्तवृत्तिक्रमः । दृष्टो हि वस्त्राभरणात्मना देशभेदोचितः स्वभावभेदः ॥४२॥
 बाहुल्येन नात्र प्रमाणाभावादित्यादिना शुष्कतर्केण असूचितव्यमिति भावः ॥४४॥
 तत्र प्राग्देशानां सीमात्वेन वक्षिणत ऊद्गाः समुद्रनिकटे उत्तरतो मागधाः तदुभयमध्य-

Reference to
 Vaṅga, Pauṇḍra and
 Tāmralipta in the
 Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata

प्राच्योतिषाः पुलिन्दाश्च वैदेहास्ताम्रलिप्तकाः ।
 प्राङ्गाः प्रावृत्यश्चैव युञ्जन्तीहोद्मागधीम् ॥ ४६ ॥
 अन्येऽपि देशाः प्राच्यां ये पुराणे सम्प्रकीर्तिताः ।
 तेषु प्रयुज्यते शेषा प्रवृत्तिश्चोद्मागधी ॥ ४७ ॥
 पाञ्चाला सौरसेनाश्च कारमोरा हास्तिनापुराः ।
 वाह्लीका शन्यकाश्चैव मद्रकौशीनरास्तथा ॥ ४८ ॥
 हिमवतसंश्रिता ये तु गङ्गायाश्चोत्तरा दिशम् ।
 ये श्रिता वै जनपदास्तेषु पाञ्चालमध्यमाः ॥ ४९ ॥

अभिनवभारती

वर्तित्वाद् उद्मागधा, अत एवोद्कलिङ्गानामुभयोपजीवित्वाभिप्रायेण वृत्तिद्वयमध्ये
 गणनम् । गिरीणामन्तर्गिराः गिरीणां वहिर्भवा वहिर्गिरा गिरेश्च
 सेनकस्य इति समासान्ते अचिरूपम् ॥४८॥ पुराण इत्यागमपूर्वकत्वमाह । एषेति
 आवन्तिकी प्राच्योतिषकामरूपीया ॥४८॥ तुरुष्काश्चार्द्रकससर्वप्रभृतयः मध्य-

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vāsika which lie between the Southern Ocean and the Vindhya [mountain] are always to take to the Dākṣiṇātyā Local Usages³.

The Āvanti Local Usage

40-41. Avanti, Vidiśā, Saurāṣṭra, Mālava, Sindhu, Sauvira, Arvudeya¹ Daśarṇa, Tripura, and Mṛttikāvat always take to the Āvanti Local Usage².

42. The performance [of a play] by [people of] these [countries] should depend on the Grand (*sāllvati*) and the Graceful [*kaiśiki*] Styles and [such a procedure] should be adopted by the producers.

The Oḍhra-Māgadhi Local Usage

43-45. Eastern¹ [countries such as] Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kalinga², Vatsa, Oḍhra (Oḍra), Magadha, Puṇḍra, Nepāla, Aṃtargira, Bahirgira, Plavamana, Malada³, Mallavartaka⁴, Brahmottara⁵, Bhārgava⁶, Mārgava⁷, Prāgyotiṣa, Polinda, Videha and Tāmralūpta, adopt the Local Usage known as the Oḍhra-Māgadhi.

46. In relation to other countries too known in the Purāṇas as belonging to the East the Oḍhra-Māgadhi Local Usage is applied.

³ Geographical names mentioned in this passage and the passages that follow, are mostly to be met with in the Purāṇas (sometimes with variant readings). For a discussion on the same see Dines Chandra Sircar, 'Text of the Puranic Lists of Peoples' (IHQ. Vol. XXI. 1945 pp. 297-314).

40-41 (B.XIII.42-43, G.42-43). ¹ Arvuda or modern Ābu in Rajputana is probably meant by this name.

43 (B.XIII.44, G.44).

43-45 (B.XIII.45-47, G.45-47). ¹ B. *prāṅgā pravṛttayah*.

² The twofold mention of Kalinga requires an explanation. It is possible that the two different Usages were current in this region.

³ Maladā be may modern Malah District of Bengal.

⁴ Mallavartaka may be modern *Mallabhum* (Bankura in Bengal).

⁵ For Brahmottara see Viśvabhāratī Patrikā, Vol. IV. pp. 250ff.

⁶ Bhārgava remains unidentified.

⁷ Mārgava remains unidentified.

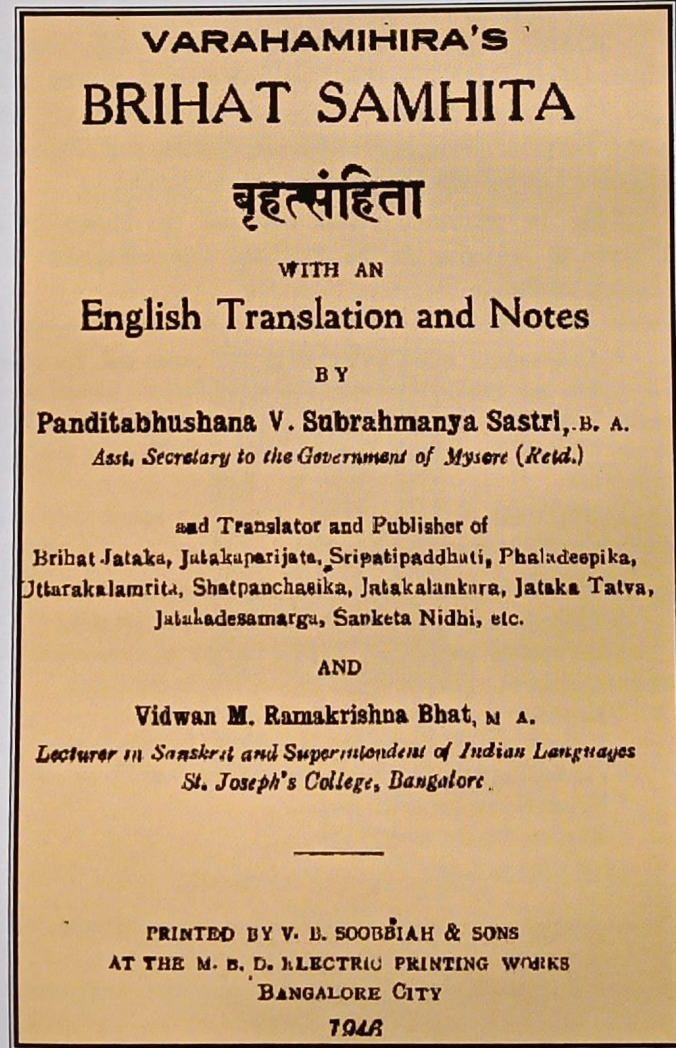
46 (B.XIII.48, G.48).

Bṛihatsamhitā, an astrological treatise ascribed to Vṛāhamihira, in chapter 14 entitled *Kūrmavibhāga* speaks of Samataṭa, Gauḍaka, Pauṇḍraka, Tāmralipta and Vardhamāna while stating the eastern countries of Bhāratavarṣa. Varāhamihira is supposed to have flourished in the 5th-6th centuries CE.⁴⁵ The text along with the English translation is as follows.

khassamagadhaśibiragirimithilasamataṭoḍrāśvadanadanturakāḥ |
prāgjyotiṣalauhityakṣīrodasamudrapuruṣādāḥ ||

udayagiribhadragauḍakapaṇḍrotkalakāśimeklāmbaṣṭhah |
ekapadatāmraliptakakosalakā vardhamānās ca ||

- (To the east are situated)...Khasas, Magadha, Mount Sibira, Mithila, Samathata, Orissa, the Aswavadanas, the Danturakas, Pragjyotisha, river Lauhitya, the milky ocean, cannibals, mountain of Sunrise, the Bhadras, Gaudas, Paundras, Utkala, Kasi, Mekala, the Ambashthas, the one-footed people, Tamraliptakas, Kosala and Burdwan.⁴⁶



45 Cf. Banerjee, op. cit., p.

46 Sastri, *Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita*, p. 161.

Slokas 2-4—To the central region belong the following :—Bhadra, Arimeda, Mandavya, Salwa, Neepa, Ujjihana, Sankhyata, Marwar, Vatsa, Ghosha, those of the Yamuna and the Saraswati, Mathsya, Madhyamika, Mathura, Upajyotisha, Dharmaranya, Surasena, Gouragriva, Uddehika, Pandu, Guda, Aswattha, Panchala, Ayodhya, Kanka, Kuru, Kalakoti, Kukura, Pariyatra mountain, Udumbara, Kapisthala and Hastinapura.

अथ पूर्वस्यामञ्जनवृषभञ्जपञ्चमाल्यवद्विरयः ।

व्याघ्रमुखमुष्णकर्षटचान्द्रपुराः शूर्पकर्णाश्च ॥५॥

खसमगधशिविरगिरिमिथिलसमतटोद्ग्राध्वदनदन्तुरकाः ।

प्राग्ज्योतिषलोहित्यक्षीरोदसमुद्रपुरुषादाः ॥६॥

उदयगिरिमद्रौडकपौण्ड्रोत्कलकाशिमकलाम्बुष्टाः ।

एकपदताम्रलिप्तककोसलका वर्धमानाश्च ॥७॥

Slokas 5-7—To the east are situated the four mountains, viz. Anjana, Vrishabhadhvaja, Padma and Malyavan ; then the Vyaghramukhas, Suhma, Karvatas, Chandrapura, the Surpulkarnas, Khasas, Magadha, Mount Sibira, Mithila, Samathata, Orissa, the Aswavadanans, the Danturakas, Pragjyotisha, river Lauhitya, the milky ocean, cannibals, mountain of Sunrise, the Bhadras, Gaudas, Paundras, Utkala, Kasi, Mekala, the Ambashthas, the one-footed people, Tamraliptakas, Kosala and Burdwan.

आग्नेय्यां दिशि कोसलकलिङ्गवङ्गोपवङ्गजठराङ्गाः ।

शौलिकविदर्भवत्सान्ध्रवेदिकाश्चोर्ध्वकण्ठाश्च ॥८॥

वृषनालिकेरचर्मद्वीपा विन्ध्यान्तवासिनस्त्रिपुरी ।

इमशुधरहेमकुब्जव्यालग्रीवा महाग्रीवाः ॥९॥

किष्किन्धकण्टकखलनिषादराष्ट्राणि पुरिकदाशार्णाः ।

सह नमर्षणशबरैरास्त्रेपाद्ये त्रिके देशाः ॥१०॥

व. सं. 21

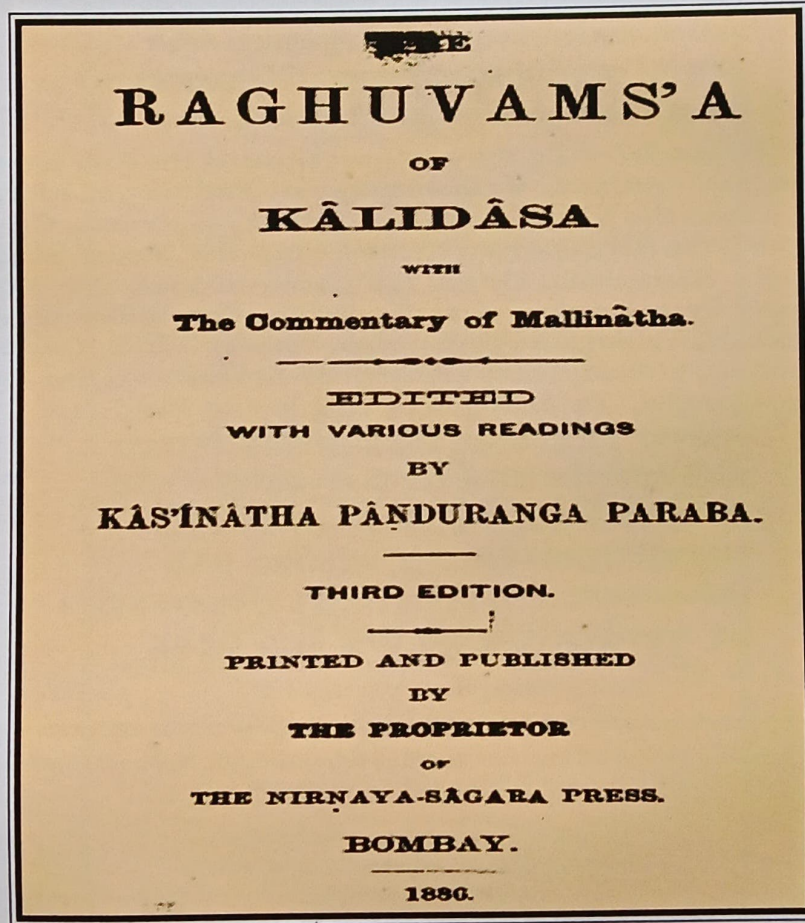
Sanskrit text along with English translation referring to Samataṭa, Gauḍa, Puṇḍra and Vardhamāna, found in *Bṛhat-saṁhitā* of Varāhamihra

The *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa while describing Raghu's military achievement mentioned that the king defeated Suhmas and Vaṅga kings. Scholars share different views regarding the date of Kālidāsa. While some place him in the 1st century BCE, others bring him down to 5th century CE. The lower terminus of his date is fixed by the mention of his name in the Aihole inscription of Pulakeśin II, belonging to 634 CE. The text of *Raghuvamśa* with English translation is as follows.

anamrāṇām samudhartus tasmāt sindhurayād iva |
ātmā saṁrakṣitaḥ **suhmair** vṛttim āśritya vaitasīm |

vaṅgān utkhāya tarasā netā nausādhanodyatān |
nicakhāna jayastambhān gaṅgāsroto 'ntareṣu saḥ |⁴⁷

- From him the uprooter of all that did not bend before him, as from the current of a river, the Suhmas saved themselves by following the course of cane-plants (adopting the policy of submission). Having by his power uprooted the Vaṅga kings, who had resisted him by means of their ships, he, the leader, planted (memorial) pillars of victory in the intervals of (i.e. the islets between) the stream of Ganges.⁴⁸



47 Kale (ed.), *The Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, p. 83 (text part).

48 Ibid., p. 29 (translation part).

पौरस्त्यानिति ॥ जयी जयनशीलः ॥ “जिहसिन्वित्री—” इत्यादिनेनिप्र-
त्ययः ॥ स रघुरेवम् । पुरो भवान्पौरस्त्यान्प्राच्यान् ॥ “दक्षिणापश्चात्पुरस्त्य-
क्” इति त्यक्प्रत्ययः ॥ तास्तान् । सर्वानित्यर्थः ॥ वीप्सायां द्विरुक्तिः ॥ जनप-
दान्देशानाक्रामंस्तालीवनैः इयामं महोदधेरुपकण्ठमन्तिकं प्राप ॥

अनप्राणां समुद्धर्तुस्तस्मात्सिन्धुरयादिव ।

आत्मा संरक्षितः सुहृद्वृत्तिमाश्रित्य वैतसीम् ॥ ३५ ॥

अनप्राणामिति ॥ अनप्राणाय ॥ कर्मणि णप् ॥ समुद्धर्तुं मूलयितुस्त-
स्माद्रघोः सकाशात् ॥ “भीत्रार्थानां भयहेतुः” इत्यपादानत्वात्पञ्चमी ॥ सिन्धुरया-
जदीवेगादिव सुहृद्वृत्तिः सुहृद्वृत्तिः ॥ सुहृदादयः शब्दा जनपदवचनाः क्षत्रियमाचक्ष-
ते ॥ वैतसीं वैतसः संबन्धिनीं वृत्तिम् । प्रणतिमित्यर्थः । आश्रित्य । आत्मा सं-
रक्षितः ॥ अत्र कौटिल्यः—“बलीयसाभियुक्तो दुर्बलः सर्वत्रानुप्रणतो वैतसधर्म-
मातिष्ठेत्” इति ॥

वङ्गानुत्खाय तरसा नेता नौसाधनोद्यतान् ।

निचखान जयस्तम्भान्गङ्गास्रोतोन्तरेषु से ॥ ३६ ॥

वङ्गानिति ॥ नेता नायकः स रघुर्नौभिः साधनैरुद्यतान्संनद्धान् वङ्गान् गङ्गास्त-
रसा बलेन ॥ “तरसी बलरंहसी” इति यादवः ॥ उत्खायोन्मूल्य गङ्गायाः स्रो-
तसां प्रवाहाणामन्तरेषु द्वीपेषु जयस्तम्भाभिवृद्धान् । स्थापितवानित्यर्थः ॥

आपादपद्मप्रणतोः कलमा इव ते रघुम् ।

फलैः संवर्धयामासुरुत्खातप्रतिरोपिताः ॥ ३७ ॥

आपादेति ॥ आपादपद्ममार्कपद्मपर्यन्तं प्रणताः । अत एवोत्खाताः पूर्वमुद्धृ-
ता अपि प्रतिरोपिताः पश्चात्स्थापितास्ते वङ्गाः । कलमा इव शालिविशेषा इव ॥
“शालयः कलमायाश्च पट्टिकायाश्च कुन्त्यमी” इत्यमरः ॥ तेऽप्यापादपद्मं पादपद्म-
मूलपर्यन्तं प्रणताः ॥ “पादो बुध्ने तुरीयांशौलमसन्तपर्वताः” इति विश्वः ॥ उ-
त्खातप्रतिरोपिताश्च ॥ रघुं फलैर्वनैः । अन्यत्र सस्यैः । संवर्धयामासुः ॥ “फलं
फले धने बीजे निष्पत्तौ भोगलाभयोः । सस्ये” इति केशवः ॥

से तीर्त्वा कपिशां सैन्यैर्बद्धद्विरदसेतुभिः ।

उत्कलादर्शितपथः कैलिङ्गाभिमुखो ययौ ॥ ३८ ॥

१ भास्याय. २ उद्धतान्. ३ प्रवणाः. ४ उत्कलेर्दर्शितपथः; उत्कलादर्शितपथः. ५ कलिङ्गा-
भिमुखम्.

THE
RAGHUVAMS'A

OF

KA'LIDA'SA,

WITH

The Commentary (the Sanjivini) of Mallinātha.

CANTOS I—X.

EDITED

*With a literal translation into English, copious notes in
Sanskrit and English and various readings, &c. &c.*

BY

MORESHWAR RA'MACHANDRA KA'LE, B.A.,

Author of 'Higher Sanskrit Grammar', 'Sāhityasārasaṅgraha',
Sanskrit Commentaries on the Vikramorvas'ya of
Kālidāsa, The Kādambarī of Bāṇa, The Nīti and
Vairāgya Śatakas of Bhartṛhari, &c. &c.

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KALBADEVI ROAD, BOMBAY.

rooted, like that of a tusker, which is marked by trees, shorn of their fruits, uprooted and destroyed in various ways.

34. Tans overrunning the kingdoms in the east the victor came to the shore of the great ocean, dark with the forests of *tālī* trees.

35. From him the uprooter of all that did not bend before him, as from the current of a river, the *Suhmas* saved themselves by following the course of cane-plants (adopting the policy of submission).

36. Having by his power uprooted the *Vaṅga* kings, who had resisted him by means of their ships, he, the leader, planted (memorial) pillars of victory in the intervals of (*i. e.* the islets between) the streams of the Ganges.

37. Like the *Kalama* plants which bend low to (or to the lotuses at) their roots and yield a rich harvest after having been first uprooted and then transplanted, they, first uprooted and then reinstated, bowed down to his lotus-like feet and honoured him by gifts of riches.

38. He crossed the river Kapis'ā with his troops by means of a bridge formed of the elephants and marched towards Kalinga, the way being led by the Utkala (Orissa) princes.

39. He planted his mighty prowess (made it keenly felt) on the head (peak) of the mountain Mahendra, just as a driver does his sharp goad in the head of a *Gambhīravedī* (not easily sensitive to pain) elephant.

40. The king of Kalinga, strong in his war elephants, received him with showers of missiles, as a mountain, showering stones, would (receive) Indra, prepared to cut its wings.

41. Having borne a heavy shower of the enemies' iron-arrows, the descendant of Kakutstha won the goddess of victory, as if after having taken an auspicious bath.

42. There, his soldiers, having prepared places for wassail, quaffed in (cups of) betel leaves coconut-wine, and also the glory of their enemies.

43. The king, a righteous conqueror, took away the wealth and not the territory of the lord of Mahendra, first made a captive but afterwards released.

44. Then marching along the sea-coast, lined with betel-nut-

English translation of respective passages in the *Raghuvamśa* of Kalidāsa

Canto IV.]

(29)

rooted, like that of a tusker, which is marked by trees, shorn of their fruits, uprooted and destroyed in various ways.

34. Thus overrunning the kingdoms in the east the victor came to the shore of the great ocean, dark with the forests of *tālī* trees.

35. From him the uprooter of all that did not bend before him, as from the current of a river, the Suhmas saved themselves by following the course of cane-plants (adopting the policy of submission).

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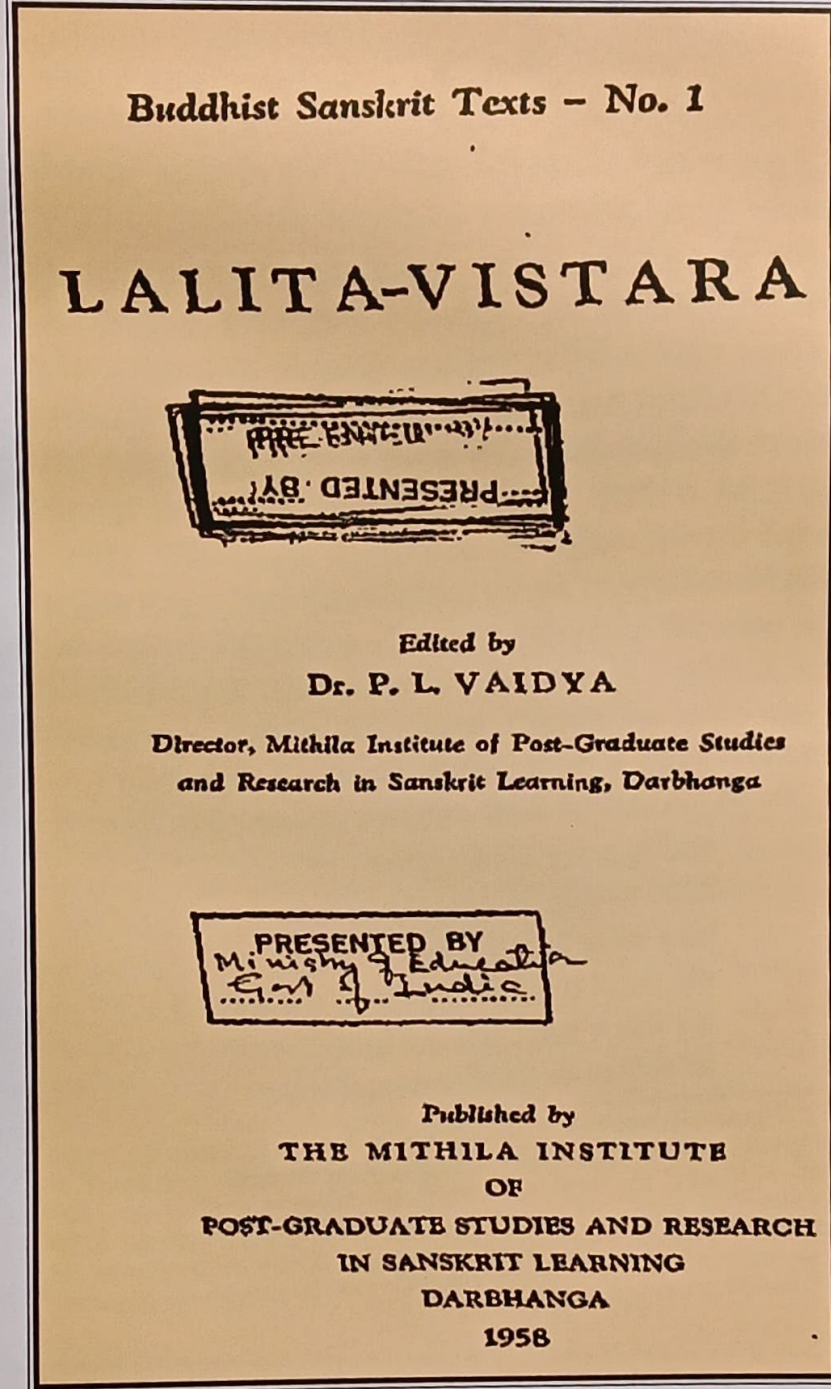
43. The king, a righteous conqueror, took away the wealth and not the territory of the lord of Mahendra, first made a captive but afterwards released.

44. Then marching along the sea-coast, lined with betel-nut-trees bearing fruit, he, to whom victory was not a thing to be

English translation of respective passage in the *Raghuvamśa* of Kalidāsa

Buddhist Literary Tradition

Lalitavistara, a work of unknown authorship and regarded as one of the most sacred texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, in its chapter 10 entitled *Lipiśālasaṃdarśanaparivarta* mentioned Vaṅgalipi amongst the 64 scripts.⁴⁹ Though the exact date of the text is still unknown, scholars suggest the date of composition of the text in its present form to be 1st or 2nd century CE.⁵⁰



49 For the complete list of 64 scripts see Vaidya (ed.), *Lalitavistara*, p. 88.

50 For further study regarding the date see *ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.

नामोपि तेप लिपिना न हि त्रिय यूयं

यत्रेष्टु शिक्षितु पुरा बहुकल्पमोदय ॥ ४ ॥

सो चित्तधार जगता विनिग्रा विचित्रा

एकक्षणेन अयु जानति शुद्धसत्त्व । -

5 अदृश्यरूपरहितस्य गतिं च वेत्ति

किं वा पुनोऽय लिपिनोऽक्षरदृश्यरूपाम् ॥ ५ ॥

इत्युक्त्वा स देवपुत्रो बोधिसत्त्व दिव्यं कुसुमैरम्यर्थं तत्रैवान्तर्दधे । तत्र धाव्यश्च चेटी
वर्गाश्च स्थापिता अभूवन् । परिशेषा शाक्या सुद्धोदनप्रमुखा प्रकामन्त ॥

अथ बोधिसत्त्व उरगसारचन्दनमय लिपिफलरूपादाय दिव्योपसुवर्णतिरक समन्ता
10 मणिरत्नप्रत्युप्त विश्वामित्रमाचार्यमेवमाह - कतमा मे मो उपाध्याय लिपिं शिक्षोपयसि । ब्राह्मी
खरोष्ठीपुष्करसारि अङ्गलिपिं बङ्गलिपिं मगधलिपिं मङ्गल्यलिपिं अङ्गुलीयलिपिं शङ्गारिलिपिं ब्रह्मवलि-
लिपिं पाँरुम्यलिपिं द्राविडलिपिं कितातलिपिं दाक्षिण्यलिपिं उग्रलिपिं सल्यालिपिं अनुलोमलिपिं अर्धमूर्ध
लिपिं दरदलिपिं खोप्यलिपिं चीनलिपिं छनलिपिं हूणलिपिं मथ्याक्षरविस्तरलिपिं पुष्पलिपिं देवलिपिं
नागलिपिं यक्षलिपिं गन्धर्वलिपिं किन्नरलिपिं महोरगलिपिं असुरलिपिं गरुडलिपिं मृगचक्रलिपिं
15 वार्यसस्तलिपिं भीमदेवलिपिं अन्तरीक्षदेवलिपिं उत्तरकुर्वीपलिपिं अपरगोडानीलिपिं पूर्वदिहलिपिं
उत्क्षेपलिपिं निक्षेपलिपिं विक्षेपलिपिं प्रक्षेपलिपिं सागरलिपिं वज्रलिपिं लेखप्रतिलेखलिपिं अनुदुतलिपिं
शाखावर्त्ता गणनावर्त्तलिपिं उत्क्षेपावर्त्तलिपिं निक्षेपावर्त्तलिपिं पादलिखितलिपिं द्विरत्तरपदसधिलिपिं
यावदशोत्तरपदसधिलिपिं मैत्र्याहारिणीलिपिं सर्वस्तसप्रहणीलिपिं विद्यानुलोमोविमिश्रितलिपिं
ऋषितपस्तता रोचमाना धरणीप्रेक्षिणीलिपिं गगनप्रेक्षिणीलिपिं सर्वप्रधिनिष्यन्दा सर्वसारसप्रहणी
20 सर्वभूतस्तप्रहणीम् । आसा मो उपाध्याय चतुष्पथीलिपीना कतमा त्व शिष्योपयिष्यसि ?

अथ विश्वामित्रो दारकाचार्यो विस्मित प्रहसितवदनो निहंतमानमददर्प इमा गायामभाषत -

आश्चर्यं शुद्धसत्त्वस्य लेके लोकानुवर्तिनो ।

शिक्षित सर्वशास्त्रेषु लिपिशालामुपागत ॥ ६ ॥

येयामह नामवेय लिपीना न प्रजानमि ।

25 तत्रैव शिक्षित सन्तो लिपिशाल्यमुपागत ॥ ७ ॥

वक्त्र चास्य न पश्यामि मूर्धानं तस्य नैव च ।

शिष्ययिष्ये कथं ह्येन लिपिप्रज्ञेय पारगम् ॥ ८ ॥

१ R नामानि for नामानि २ R यक्षित्रधार for सो वित्त ३ R प्राकामन्त for प्रकामन्त
४ R दिव्यवर्णरुक् सुवर्ण for दिव्यापसुवर्ण ५ शिक्षयिष्यसि for शिक्षापयसि ६ R ब्रह्मवर्ती for
ब्रह्मवर्ती ७ R मनुष्य for पाह्य ८ R किन्नारि for कितात ९ R दक्षिण for दाक्षिण्य
१० R अदृष्टानु for भवमूर्ध ११ R खाल्य for खाल्य १२ R गृणलिपि चक्रलिपि for मृगचक्र
१३ R मरुद्विपि for वायसल १४ R अप्यहारिणि for मथ्याहारिणी १५ R विद्यानुलोमलिपि विमि
for लेखाधिसि १६ R शिष्ययिष्यसि for शिष्यापयि १७ R हतमददर्प for निहंतमानमद
१८ R शिष्ययिष्ये १९ R प्रज्ञापारगम् for प्रज्ञाय पारगम्

Two Pali texts from Sri Lanka viz. the *Dīpavaṃśa* and *Mahāvāṃśa*, belonging to 4th century CE and 6th century CE⁵¹ respectively possess mentions of geographical regions of ancient Bengal. Both the texts serve valuable information regarding the history of ancient India and Sri Lanka as well. Within a moderate period men of the Sinhalese race had acquired proficiency in the use of Pali tongue and were capable of employment as a language of culture and science, and gradually Pali became their literary dialect. Quite soon afterwards scholars began to compose works in Pali, so that the knowledge which they had garnered in the course of their studies might be recorded for the benefit of generations yet unborn. The earliest attempt at such writings that has come down to us is the *Dīpavaṃśa*. The *Dīpavaṃśa* and the *Mahāvāṃśa*, indeed in the main nothing but two versions of the same substance, both being based on the historical introduction to the great commentary of the Mahāvihāra. Each work deals with the subject in its own way. The *Dīpavaṃśa* following step by step and almost word for word the traces of the original, while the *Mahāvāṃśa* proceeds with much independence. As both the texts were derived from the same source, both the compositions finish their records with the death of king Mahāsena. These two texts of great importance possess dedicated sections, that describe the journey of king Vijaya, king of Vaṅga and descendent of king Aśoka as well. In Sinhalese tradition Vijaya with his 700 followers landed in Sri Lanka in 543 BCE.⁵² Following the two texts we find names of Tāmalitti (i.e. Tāmralipti), Vardhamānapura, Lāḍaraṭṭha (i.e. Rāḍha) etc.

Jaina Literary Heritage

In the Jain canonical text *Kalpasūtra* of Bhadrabāhu, a contemporary to Candragupta Maurya,⁵³ we find mention of Godāsa, a disciple of Bhadrabāhu, who flourished in the fourth century BCE. From Godāsa there originated four *śākhās* or branches, of which three names are significant viz. Tāmraliptika, Koṭivarṣiya and Puṇḍravardhaniya. From the names of these three branches it is evident that they were connected to Bengal. Further we may quote Chatterjee.

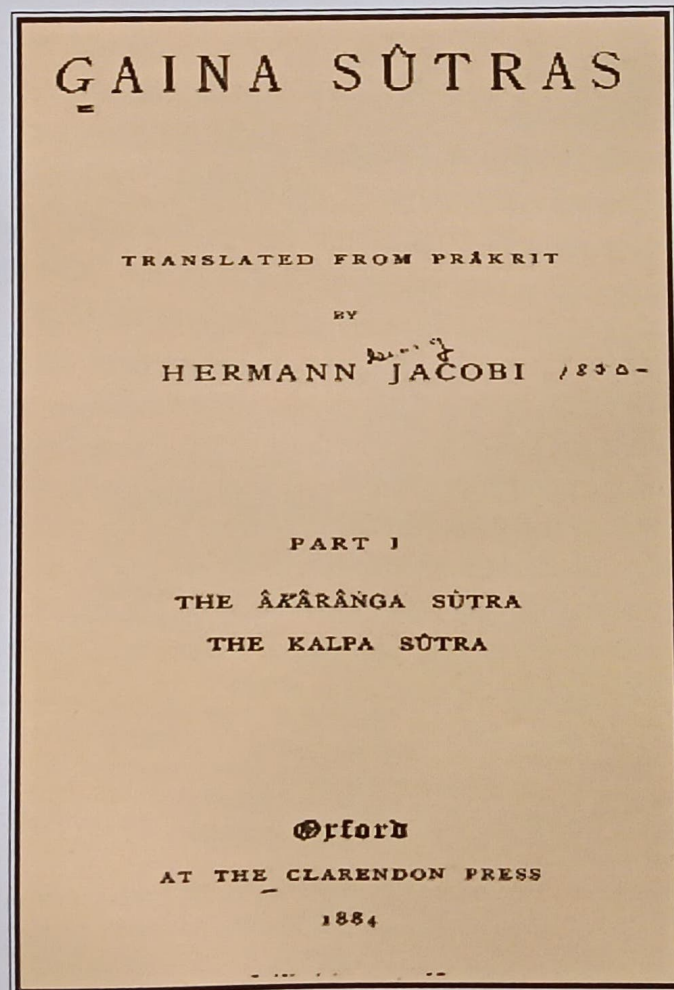
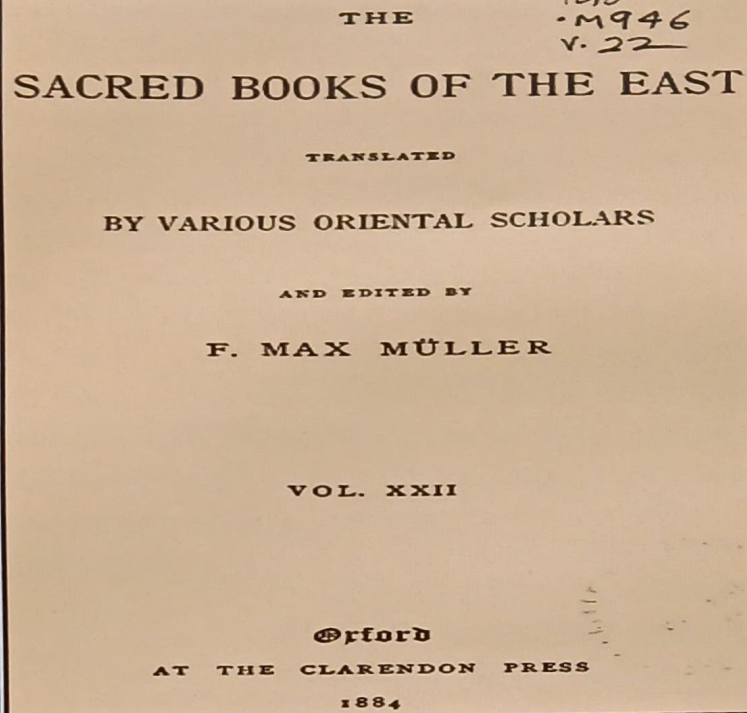
The first name does not need any comment. The second, Koṭivarṣa, according to *Paṇṇāpaṇṇā*, a canonical text, was the capital of Lāḍha country and the third, present north Bengal. We have already noticed that Mahāvīra himself visited some places in Bengal during his missionary career, so it is natural that Jainism should flourish after his death in the places where he taught his doctrine. There was however another more important factor behind the popularity of Jainism in Bengal in pre-Christian times. We have already seen that according to *Therāvalī* all these *śākhās* originated from Godāsa, who was a great disciple of Bhadrabāhu. Now this saint (i.e. Bhadrabāhu), according to the *Bṛhatkathākośa* of Hariṣeṇa (AD 931), was born at the town of Devakoṭṭa situated in the Puṇḍravardhana country. There is no doubt that Hariṣeṇa was indebted to earlier works for this information about Bhadrabāhu's place of birth. It is natural therefore, that the *śākhās* founded by Godāsa, a disciple of Bhadrabāhu, should be connected to Bengal.⁵⁴

51 Malalasekera, *Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, p. 14.

52 Ibid., p. 15.

53 Chatterjee, *A Comprehensive History of Jainism*, Vol. I, p. 48.

54 Ibid., p. 34.



- ii. Ārya Suhastin of the Vāsishṭha gotra ;
 9. Susthita and Supratibuddha, surnamed Kōṭika and Kākandaka, of the Vyāghrāpatya gotra ;
 10. Ārya Indradatta (Indadinna) of the Kausika gotra ;
 11. Ārya Datta (Dinna) of the Gautama gotra ;
 12. Ārya Simhagiri Gātismara of the Kausika gotra ;
 13. Ārya Vagra of the Gautama gotra ;
 14. Ārya Vagrasena of the Utkrīṣṭha gotra¹.

He had four disciples : Ārya Nāgila, Ārya Padmīla, Ārya Gayanta, and Ārya Tāpasa, each of whom founded a Sākhā called after his name, viz. the Āryanāgilā Sākhā, the Āryapadmīlā Sākhā, the Āryagayantī Sākhā, and the Āryatāpast Sākhā. (4)

In the detailed redaction the list of Sthaviras after Ārya Yasobhadra is the following :

6. i. Ārya Bhadrabāhu of the Prākīna gotra, who had four disciples of the Kāśyapa gotra :
 a. Godāsa, founder of the Godāsa Gana², which was divided into four Sākhās :
 α. The Tāmraliptikā Sākhā,
 β. The Kōṣivarshīyā Sākhā,
 γ. The Puṇḍravardhantīyā Sākhā, and

¹ He is left out in some MSS.

² It is not quite clear what is meant by Gana, Kula, and Sākhā. Gana designates the school which is derived from one teacher ; Kula the succession of teachers in one line ; Sākhā the lines which branch off from each teacher. These terms seem to be disused in modern times, for the four principal divisions called after Nāgendra, Kandra, Nivrīti, and Vidyādhara are generally called Kulas, but also occasionally Sākhās. They go back to Vagra according to some, to Vagrasena according to others. The modern Gakkha appears equivalent with the ancient Gana.

The fifth Jaina Āgama *Bhagavatīsūtra*, an encyclopaedic work produced by the traditional Jaina scholarship, in chapter 1 of *Śataka* 3 mentioned Tāmalittī, i.e. Tāmralipti⁵⁵ quite a few times. According to the followers of Skandila the text of *Bhagavatīsūtra* in its present form has come down to us from Vīra Samvat 980 (approximately 553 CE), while Nāgārjuna's followers believe the text to be from Vīra Samvat 893 (466 CE) when the fourth and last Jaina council assembled at Valabhī in Saurāṣṭra under the Chairmanship of Kṣamāśramaṇa.

Chinese Travelogues

An abundance of cross-cultural exchanges was set off through the spread of Buddhist doctrines from India to China beginning sometime in the first century CE, that had a huge impact on Asian and history of the world as well. The travels of Buddhist monks and pilgrims, and the simultaneous circulation of religious texts and relics not only encouraged interactions between Indian kingdoms and various regions of China, but also affected people of Central and Southeast Asia. Chinese pilgrims played a key role in the exchanges between ancient India and ancient China. They introduced new texts and doctrines to the Chinese clergy, carried Buddhist paraphernalia for the performance of rituals and ceremonies, and provided detailed accounts of their spiritual journeys to India. Records of Indian society and its virtuous rulers, accounts of the flourishing monastic institutions, and stories about the magical and miraculous prowess of the Buddha and his disciples often accompanied the descriptions of the pilgrimage sites in their travel records.

Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing were among hundreds of Chinese monks who made pilgrimages to India during the first millennium CE. The detailed accounts of their journeys make them more famous than others. These travel records are important historical resources for several reasons. First, they provide meticulous accounts of the nature of Buddhist doctrines, rituals, and monastic institutions in South, Central, and Southeast Asia. Second, they contain vital information about the social and political conditions in South Asia and kingdoms situated on the routes between China and India. Third, they offer remarkable insights into cross-cultural perceptions and interactions. Additionally, these accounts throw light on the arduous nature of long-distance travel, commercial exchanges, and the relationship between Buddhist pilgrims and itinerant merchants. Faxian was one of the first and perhaps the oldest Chinese monk who traveled in India in 399 CE. In the course of his journey sometime in 408 or 409 CE he reportedly traveled on a mercantile ship from the port of Tāmralipti to Sri Lanka. Tāmralipti, as is found in the travelogue, is as follows.

Continuing his journey east for nearly fifty yojanas, he came to the country of Tāmralipti, (the capital of which is) a seaport. In the country there are twenty-two monasteries, at all of which there are monks residing. The Law of the Buddha is also flourishing in it. Here Fā-Hien stayed two years, writing out the Sūtras, and drawing pictures of images.

After this he embarked in a large merchant-vessel, and went floating over the sea to the south west. It was the beginning of winter, and the wind was favourable; and, after fourteen days, sailing day and night, they came to the country of Singhala.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ For the text and English translation see Lalwani, *Bhagavatī Sūtra*, Vol. II, pp. 22-29.

⁵⁶ Legge, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, p. 100.

Xuanzang, the Chinese monk who promoted Buddhist doctrines and the perception of India as a holy land through his writings, embarked on his trip to India in 627 CE. Xiyu Ji, the itinerary of Xuanzang, referred to Karṇasuvarṇa, the capital of Śaśāṅka, as Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na. according to Xuanzang, he moved from Tan-mo-li-ti (i.e. Tāmralipti) to the country of Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na, near the capital of which was the Lo-to-mi-chih monastery. On the strength of the identification of Lo-to-mi-chih (Raktamṛttikā) monastery with the excavated monastery at Rajbadidanga in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal, Karṇasuvarṇa can now be located with greater exactitude in the neighbourhood of the excavated site. The site is locally known as Raja Karṇa's palace. The discovery of the terracotta sealings recording the name of raktamṛttikāmahāvihāra discards all doubts about the identification of the place. Besides Karṇasuvarṇa detailed accounts of Pun-na-fa-tan-na or Puṇḍravardhana, San-mo-ta-cha or Samataṭa and Tan-mo-li-ti or Tāmralipti are found in the text.⁵⁷

Inscriptional Sources

Apart from literary sources, inscriptions provide a number of tangible evidences of ethno-geographical history of ancient Bengal. The earliest of these is the Mahasthangarh inscription, which speaks of Puḍanagala, i.e. Pūṇḍranagara and Saṁvaṅgīya people. Palaeographical feature of the inscription puts it to the period of 3rd century BCE.⁵⁸ Mention of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti is found in two inscriptions on copper plates, belonging to the period of Budhagupta (c. 476-494 CE), found from Damodarpur.⁵⁹

Regarding Vaṅga, the Nagarjunikonda inscription of Vīrapuruṣadatta (3rd century CE) and Mehrauli pillar inscription of Candra (5th century CE) provide valuable information.⁶⁰

Last but not the least, the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (4th century CE) bears the name of Samataṭa, which is the first instance of the place name being mentioned in inscriptional record.⁶¹

⁵⁷ For the English translation see Beal, *Buddhist Records*, Vol. I, pp. 210, 212 and Vol. II, pp. 194-195, 199-204.

⁵⁸ For the inscription see Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, vol. 1, pp. 79-80; also chapter "Saṁvaṅgīya to Bengal".

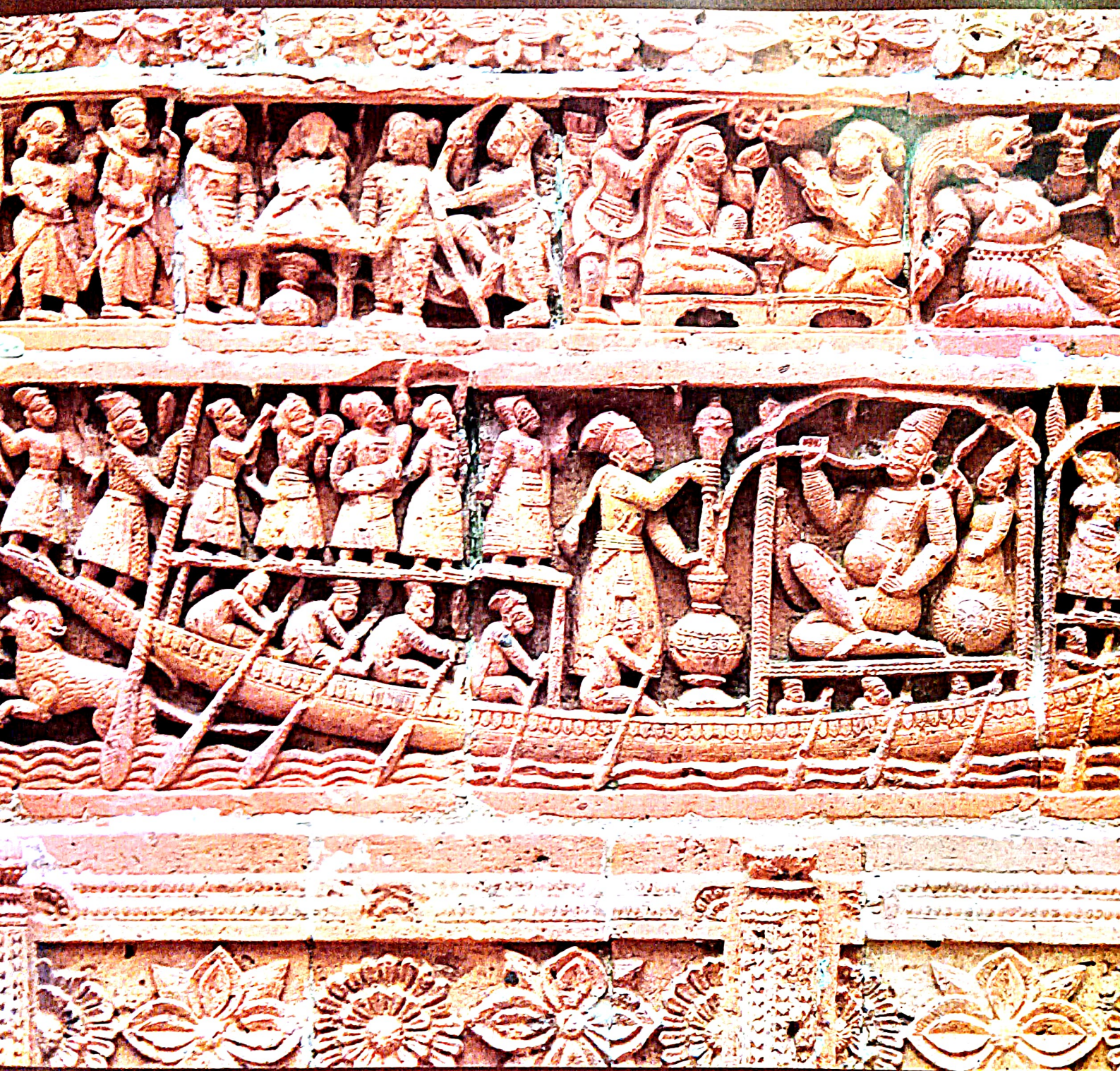
⁵⁹ For the Inscriptions Sircar, op. cit., pp. 332-336.

⁶⁰ For Inscriptions *ibid.*, pp. 233-4, 283.

⁶¹ For inscription *ibid.*, p. 265.

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Chapter Five

Maritime History of Bengal

Rajat Sanyal
Amitava Das

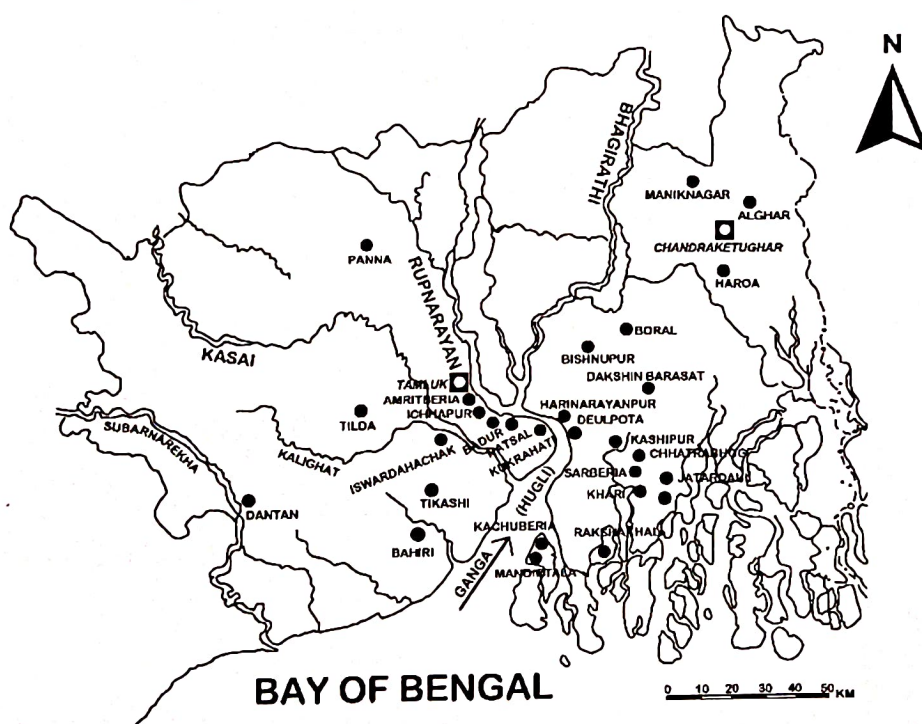
In this chapter, we are broadly exploring the existence of various seaports/riverports in the Bengal coast, both in early historic period and early medieval era, which were not only hubs of a dynamic mercantile trade route in these parts; but also showcased a vibrant cultural community who had regular transactions with many countries of South-east Asia.

With the existence of several ports situated at river mouths or outlets to the sea, the eastern and western coastlines of the Indian subcontinent experienced a dynamic nautical network. The sprightly entity of these entrepôts along the two coastlines have often led savants to induct them as the most coveted geographical spaces across the coasts (Broeze, 1989: 4, Pearson 2015: xx). Through these nodes of mercantile organization and hubs communications were stimulated. Across the eastern Indian Ocean throughout the early-early medieval era vigorous commercial activities and mobility are indicated by the presence of numerous ports in the eastern seaboard. In the east there are three coastal sectors viz., the Bengal coast (West Bengal and Bangladesh), the Andhra-Kalinga coast and the Coromandel coast. Among these, the Bengal coast would be our focus.

We observe the emergence and commencement of seaports and riverports in three broad geochronological circumstances in the

Bengal coast. The ports of the early historic period are situated in south-western Bengal, within the periphery of the present Indian State of West Bengal. On the other hand, ports of the early

medieval period are riveted in eastern and south-eastern parts of Bengal, in the present Independent Republic of Bangladesh. The two distinctive groups of ports had thrived within this spatio-temporal frame. Hence, a discourse of the early Bengal ports would follow a trajectory intertwining the three elements of geography, chronology and materiality, one sometimes overlapping with one of the other two. To be more precise, our focus in south-western Bengal would be on the ports of Tāmralipta



Map showing archaeological sites around the port sites of Chandraketugarh and Tamluk (after Datta 2004)

and Gange and for eastern-southeastern Bengal those of Samandar, Devaparvata and Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka would be the center of attention.

PORTS OF SOUTH-WESTERN BENGAL

We find a considerable amount of textual references in early Indian literary heritage about seaport at the port-city of Tāmralipta, almost universally identified with the existing site of Tamluk ($22^{\circ}17'50''\text{N}/87^{\circ}55'24''\text{E}$) in the district of Purba [East] Medinipur of West Bengal, (Law 1954: 263). On the other hand, the site of Chandraketugarh ($22^{\circ}41'51.36''\text{N}/88^{\circ}41'17.91''\text{E}$) situated on the shores of the river Bidyadhari (Ray 1980, Sanyal 1962), about 35 km north-east of Kolkata in the neighbourhood of Berachampa in the district of North Twenty-four Parganas, flourished as a riverport of the early historic period. The port of Gange, located in the country of Gange, through which the river Ganges flowed to the sea is being talked about in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and Ptolemy's *Geography*

(Majumdar 1960: 308, 375). Generally, Chandraketugarh is being identified with the port of Gange. A number of corroborations of material culture demonstrating the vibrant existence of these ports in the maritime and inland trade network in the early historical era are available to us.

With Tāmralipta we may begin our discourse. As Aśoka's Dhamma missions reached Tāmraparnī or Sri Lanka, it is beyond any doubt that the eastern

Bottom: Triratha temple at Chandraketugarh (Photo Rajat Sanyal) Triratha temple at Chandraketugarh (Photo Rajat Sanyal)



Indian Ocean began to be frequented by about the third century BCE (Sircar 1965: 18). Now if the account of the voyage of Aśoka's son and daughter to Sri Lanka from Tāmralipta, depicted in



the *Divyāvadāna*, a Buddhist text of third century CE, is believed, then in all likelihood such a maritime voyage for Sri Lanka started from Tāmralipta, the only arch seaport of early historic Bengal. Considering the indirect textual evidence further, it can also be acknowledged that this seaport also figured in the trade networks of the lower and the middle Gangetic. A route from Tāmralipta to Pāṭliputra via 'Vinjhātavi', a forested landscape devoid of human occupation, is being accentuated by B.C. Law (Law 1954: 271) implying that it must have been somewhere in the Chhotanagpur plateau region, linking the southern lowland with the more northern-northwestern uplands. Now the question arises that is it, by any chance, feasible that the territory forming the buffer zone between Tāmralipta and Pāṭliputra was responsible behind this procurement mechanism, if the etymology of the toponym 'Tāmralipta' is connected with the use/ procurement of tāmra or copper? At present it cannot be evinced. We, at a later part of this section, will come back to argue that Tāmralipta

incessantly enjoyed a desired repute as a trading port as well as a strong centre of administration in south-western Bengal till eighth century CE at least if not still later.



Around the third century CE, as is being informed by the account of Kang Tai, horses were brought from

Top: Sealing with image of ship from Chandraketurgh (courtesy of Chandraketurgh Museum)



Top: Circular terracotta medallion showing lady riding horse, first century BCE (courtesy of Chandraketugarh Museum)

Central Asia through the north-western corridor of India; from the port of Tāmralipta they were transhipped, traversing across the subcontinent, to regions of Southeast Asia. The river of

Tien-chu is identified with the Ganges by Kang Tai in his *Funan-chuan* and he places its mouth in the territory of Tan-mei i.e., Tāmralipti (Chakravarti 1992, Mukherjee 1982). Relying on material unearthed from the site of Chandraketugarh we, in a little while, will have occasion to get back to more discrete proof on horse-trade.

An inscription, belonging to the fifth century, of the master mariner (*mahānāvika*) named Buddhagupta, a resident of Raktamṛttikā, is referred to often concerning the maritime network between the Bengal coast and the Malay peninsula (Ghosh 2006, Sircar 1965: 497). This Raktamṛttikā has been identified with the 'lo-to-mo-chi' monastery near Kārṇasuvarṇa described by Xuanzang.

Identified with the modern Kansona area of the Murshidabad district of



Right: Monastic site at Rajbaridanga

West Bengal, wherefrom seals bearing the name, written in the script of seventh century CE, of the Raktamṛttikā monastery have been found (Das 1968, Sircar 1967). This Buddhist mariner, as has been assumed, must have helmed through the river Bhagirathi-Hugli to the seacoast and then flitted across the Bay of Bengal to reach the Malay Peninsula. In all probability Tāmralipta was the port of his decampment.

A Jain text, not much heard of, of western Indian origin entitled *Vasudevahimḍī*, 'a romantic tale' of the class of *saṃkiṇṇākahā*, 'employed for religious exhortation' provides the earliest evidence confirming acquaintance of Tāmralipta with western India. The text is composed in two parts between the early decades of the sixth century and the later part of the ninth century by Saṃghadāsa and Dharmasenagaṇī respectively (Jamkhedkar 1984: 3, 8).

The chronologically earlier section of sixth century of these two-part text recounts the story of the 'wanderings (*himḍī*)' of two men named Dhammilla and Vasudeva. In course of narration it records that the two contiguous territories of Tāmalitti and Tosalī, were belligerent to each other. More importantly, it is the only textual evidence on Tāmralipta that explicitly mentions it as 'Tāmalitti-Visaya' (Jamkhedkar *ibid.*: 240). Now, if these two statements are collocated against each other, it may be inferred that Tāmralipta had gained some administrative recognition in southwestern Bengal in the sixth century. For this write-up, however, the statement that concerns us comes, again, from the first segment of the text documenting that (Jamkhedkar *ibid.*: 140-41)

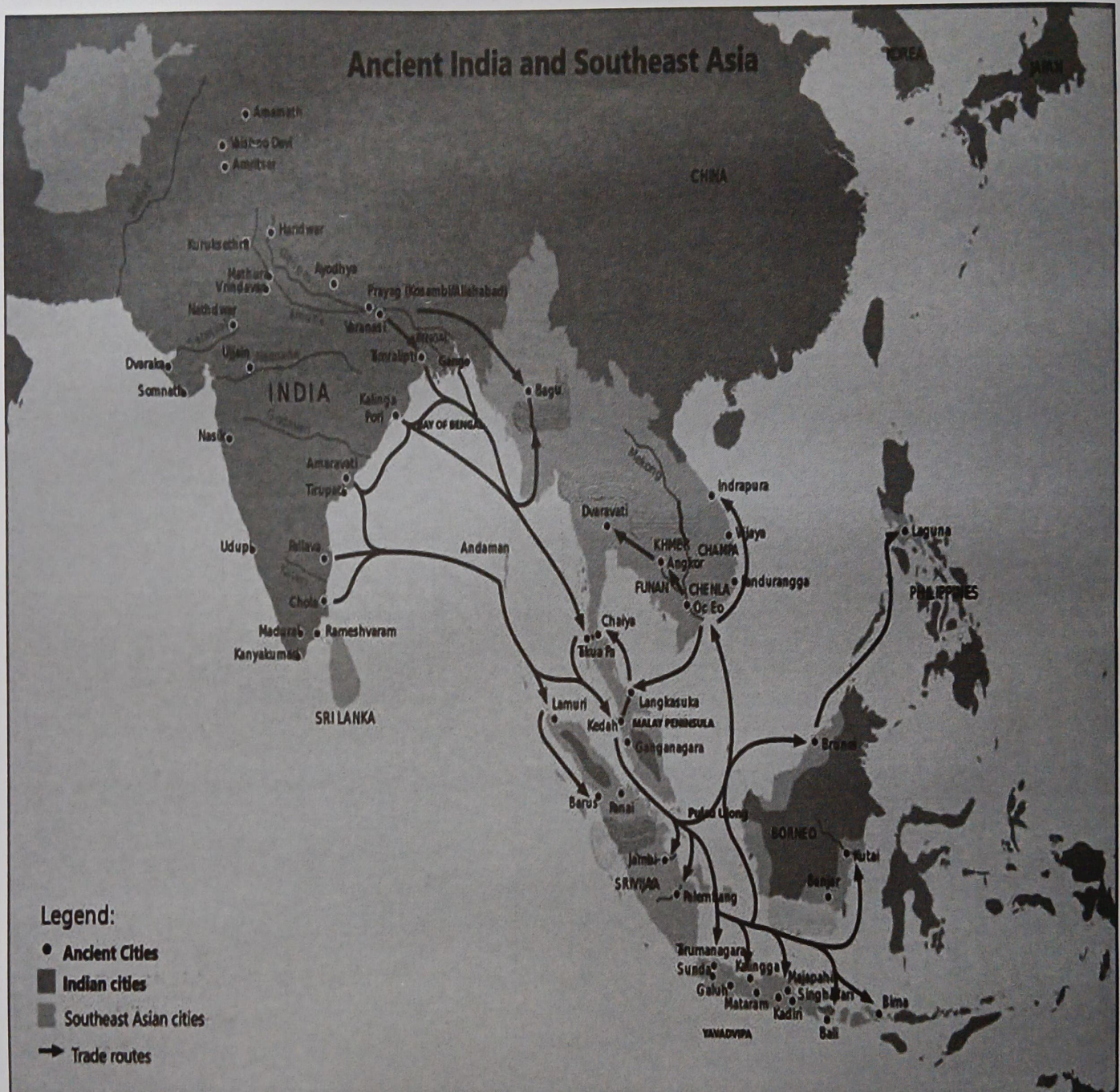
Tāmalitti was an emporium of international and interprovincial trade. Cārusāmī [a character of one of the stories in the text] intended to lead his caravan carrying cotton and thread from Campā and Ukkala to Tāmalitti [...] probably to get a wider market. In the story of Kokkāsa, a trader from Tāmalitti is said to have made a voyage to the Yavaṇa country.

One can safely argue on the basis of this narrative that till the early centuries of the early medieval period Tāmralipta still stood at the intersection of two major routes: the one leading to Pāṭaliputra via Bhagalpur in south-eastern Bihar across Farakka and Sultanganj, and the other one to the Utkala country of northern Odisha through the south-western borders of West Bengal.

In the accounts of three Chinese pilgrims, viz., Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing, spanning between the fifth and the seventh centuries, association of Tāmralipta with Southeast Asia is highlighted. According to Faxian's description, it was Tāmralipta from where in 415 CE he boarded a merchant vessel directly to Sri Lanka. He went to Java from there and reached China finally. The voyage, through a transoceanic expedition using the northeast monsoon, took him straight to Sri Lanka; in another vessel from Sri Lanka he embarked to Java from where he arrived at the Chinese coast, his ultimate destination (Legge 1886: 111). This account of Faxian indubitably proves Tāmralipta's direct connectivity with Sri Lanka and an indirect one with Java in maritime Southeast Asia. The inhabitants of 'tan-mo-lih-ti' (Tāmralipti) are mentioned as wealthy in the travelogue of

Xuanzang. The mercantile pursuits of the port made quite an impression on him. He delineates that 'it was centre of commerce

In the late seventh century CE Yijing, in his travel account, depicted his overseas



by land and water', and observed further that 'rare and precious goods were collected here', evidently for trading reasons (Rongxi 1996: 267)

voyage to Śrīvijaya (or the southern part of Sumatra) from Tāmralipta across the Bay of Bengal. There were two itineraries, as he states clearly, which connected India and China. One was a land route and the

other one was a sea route from Canton to Condore (Kumlun) through Malacca, Kedah, Pegu and Tāmralipti (**Li Rongxi 2000: 2, 155**). He, thus, clearly indicates that Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, travelling between eastern India and Sri Lanka, used the port of Tāmralipta for embarkation and disembarkation. To go on board upon a journey to Southeast Asia also this port was favoured. The stories found in two Jātakas, viz., the *Mahājanakajātaka* and the *Saṅkhajātaka* might support the existence of this route much earlier than the time of Yijing's visit. The former (no. 539) states that to gain wealth as soon as possible, Mahājanaka, the son of a defeated king of Videha, undertook trade so that he could endow his campaign against the person who expropriated his father's throne. Mahājanaka's appetency to prosper through trading ventures is depicted in this tale. Mahājanaka, in spite of his mother's effort to dissuade him from his course of action, was stubborn in his resolution to go to Suvarṇabhūmi for achieving opulence. He, after racking up commodities including pearls, jewels and diamonds, boarded on a ship with some tradesmen bound for Suvarṇabhūmi. By inference the port, though not mentioned by name in the narrative, appears to be Tāmralipta, the only port in the eastern seaboard having easy access to Mithila in northern Bihar (Cowell 1907: 19–37). *Saṅkhajātaka* (no. 442), on the other hand, tells the story of Bodhisattva, born as a very rich brāhmaṇa named Saṅkha in Molinīnagara (Benares). On alms-giving he spent six thousand daily. One day he thought to himself, 'My store of wealth once gone, I shall have nothing to give. While it is still unexhausted I will take ship, and sail for the Gold Country, whence I will bring back wealth' (Cowell

1901: 10). After making arrangements for a ship to be built and filling it with merchandise he bade farewell to wife and child. The nearest port, in this case also, was Tāmralipta.

From a geoarchaeological viewpoint, spatial distribution of archaeological sites abutting the junction at Tamluk has been subjected to exhaustive research recently, resulting in the notice of number of adjacent sites that must have backed up for a sustained prosperity of this port-city (Gangopadhyay 2010). We may have a discourse on some select specimens of interest among certain groups of artefacts of art historical and/or mercantile significance, demonstrating a vigorous existence of Tāmralipta in the larger loop of trading associations with both the west and the east coasts. The first of these is a terracotta female head having distinct features of extraneous artisanship. Asher inaccurately identified it as a 'stone female head' (Asher 2000: Pl. 32.6). Equally significant is a portable stone image of a seated Buddha in *bhūmisaparsāsamudrā* from an elusive find-spot in Howrah district, with his 'flaming *ushnisha*' resembling images from coastal sites of peninsular India, particularly Nagapattinam (Asher *ibid.*: 514). The next evidence is supposedly an inscribed terracotta plaque containing a three-lined Greek inscription, which is found from a locality called Tildaganja (22°14'37.93"N/88°40'48.40") a neighbouring site of Tamluk, more popularly known as Tilda/Tildah in archaeological literature. It is located about 24km west of Tamluk in the Jalchak Gram Panchayat of the Pingla Police Station in Paschim [West] Medinipur district. Now the riddle of this

artifact deserves a note. Discovery of this tablet at the site happened in the 1950s as an outcome of the exploration by the Asutosh Museum of the University of Calcutta. According to the official report of the Archaeological Survey of India, it was (IAR 1955-56: 62) -

A terracotta piece with three lines of Greek inscription, the middle line of which, according to Father P. Turmes, S. J., of St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, may mean that the terracotta was 'an offering to the "East Wind and the Dawn"', i.e. 'the East Wind that comes with the Dawn.'

from Tamruk indicates a noticeably broader catchment within which constant growth of the trading

communities embarking at Tāmralipta was occurring.

Proliferation of this early historic site of ~1.5km with a possible mud rampart and moat within the larger orbit of coastal settlement network is unveiled further through a later exploration (Chakrabarti 2001: 150-51). Apropos of Tāmralipta's trade with the Roman world the inscription, 'reportedly in the Asutosh Museum', has been frequently cited (Basak 2014: 167, Chakrabarti 2001: 151, Sahu 1964: 458, Sengupta 1996: 121, Tomber 2008: 129), though unfortunately a photograph of it has never been published. Nonetheless, one has to surmise, if the evidence of this inscription is accepted, that in the beginning of the Common Era the mariner, who must have started his journey to the west from the coast of Bengal was so well apprised with the significance of the northeasters that he intimated this message in the form of a permanent record for his cohort sailors and successors. To add more, its discovery from a site no less than 24km



Two types of storage vessels, among ceramic specimens, discovered from almost all the major coastal sites of West Bengal like Tamruk, Chandraketurgh and Bahiri are conspicuous.



The first type of vessels is shaped with shallow mouth, grooved neck, conical body and cylindrical base; the second is a globular jar with shallow mouth, narrow neck, luted handle and tapering

base. In all probability

availability of these materials

in these areas is rooted in trading connections, though we are far from being assured on the presumable line/s of correlation that guided the arrival of these materials to these coastal sites. A wider sphere of habitation around the ancient site of Tāmralipta, further, is clearly substantiated by a considerable amount of excavated and explored archaeological sites, in and around modern Tamluk (Chattopadhyay 2018: 45–51). It is being indicated by a current study of the excavated

ceramic repertoire from the excavated site of Bahiri

that across the northern strip of the eastern Indian

Ocean regime the

site established

part of a wider

exchange

network

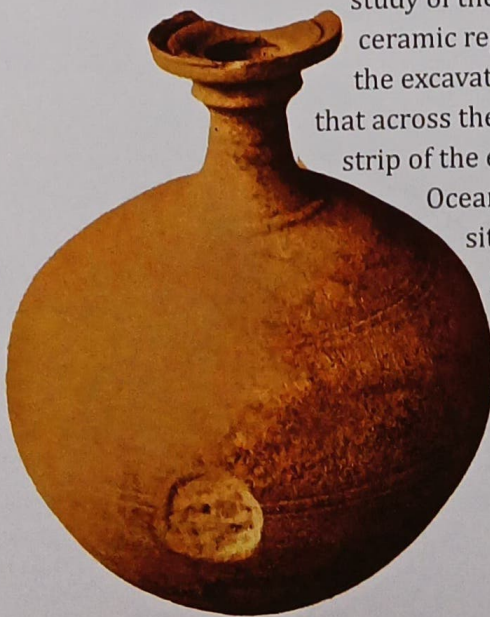
(Gangopadhyay

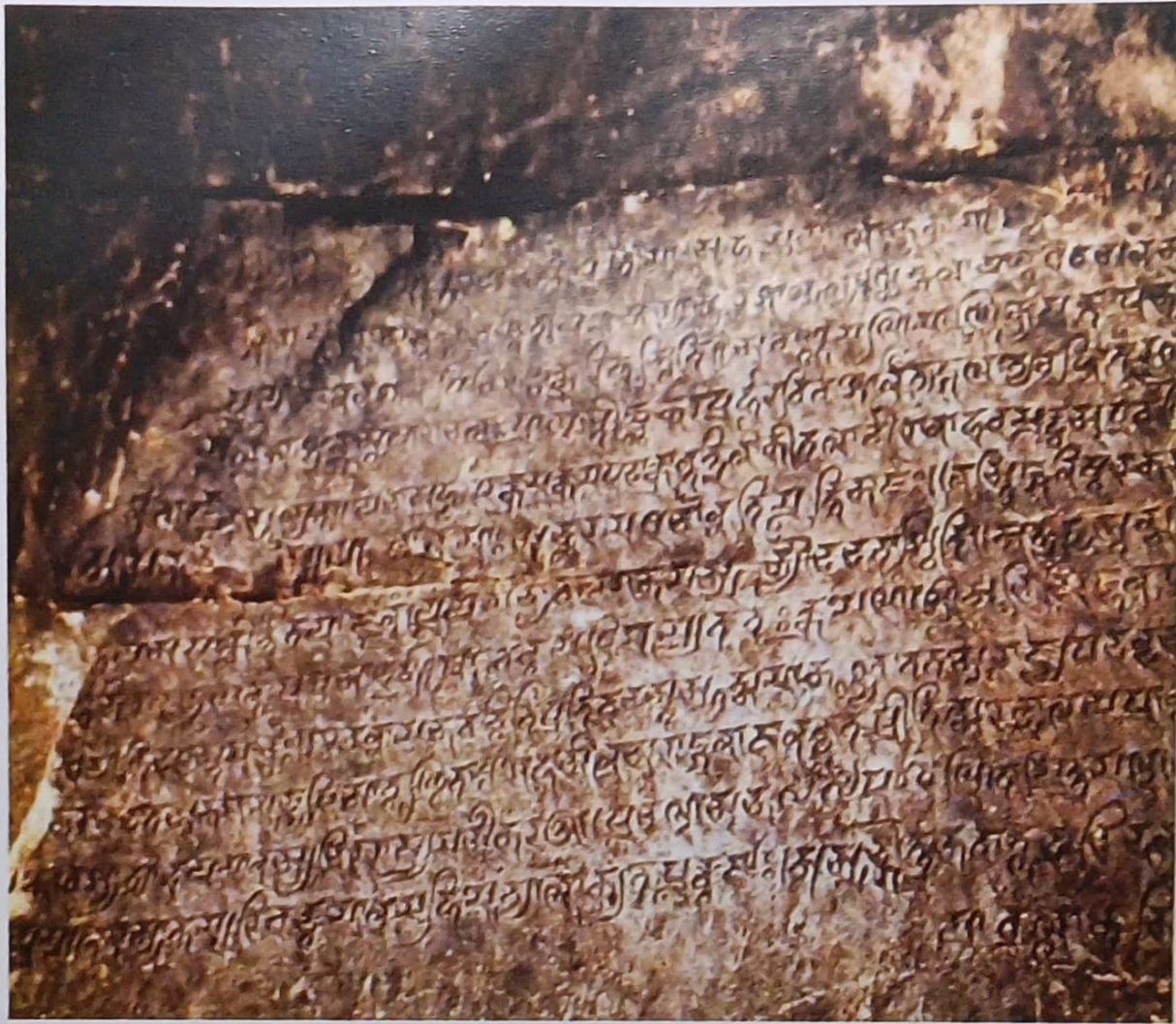
and Chatterjee

2019).



Right & Top &
Below : Potteries of
Chandraketugarh





Left : Dudhpani rock inscription

The Dudhpani rock inscription of the eighth century is the last known epigraphic reference to Tāmralipta in the early medieval period. It is found in an area of thicketed region near Hazaribagh which is nearly beyond reach. The inscription narrates the expedition of three brothers to Tāmralipta from Ayodhyā for business, who from their commerce accumulated huge wealth successfully (Kielhorn 1894). This journey, which is likely to have been by land route through Hazaribagh, hints at an extensive hinterland of this port reaching up to the ancient Kośala country. Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita*, dated sometime between 550 and 650 CE (Kale 1966: xxiv), too provides evidence of

flourishing port of Tāmralipta, referred to as *velākula*(port)in the text. Arrival of a ship, as described by Daṇḍin, with Yavanas (in this case perhaps denoting Graeco-Roman or any foreigner from the west) in the port of Dāmalipta, identified as Tāmralipta also supports the view mentioned above (Kale *ibid.*: 155). As noted earlier, a set of early historic Classical texts of most wide acclamation is used to identify Chandraketugarh as the port named Gange. Formation of a necessary component of the coastal network by subsistence objects like agricultural products, textiles etc. is indicated by augmentation of the networks in the subcontinent. Hence, it can be said that Bengal was very much a part of this thriving coastal trade system.



Top: Circular inscribed terracotta sealing showing image of ship, from Chandraketugarh (courtesy of Chandraketugarh Museum)

In addition to this, Bengal, as a part of the trading structure, perhaps exchanged grains with some areas of Southeast Asia. It is a familiar fact that flourishing agriculture is the out-turn of the innate environment yielded by the valleys of the major rivers in the mainland. The terrain in Thailand and Cambodia, for this reason, can be terraced for rice cultivation easily. Logically, for mainland Southeast Asia there should not be any need for demand for paddy from Bengal or any other region. But if we consider the Malay Peninsula, which is dominated by the Tenasserim range, running longitudinally as a broken chain closer to the west coast than the east, we find that the west coast is devoid of vast agricultural lands, as it is mostly rocky and covered with evergreen rain

forest. So, in order to fulfil their necessity societies in the coastal areas in exchange of their mineral wealth needed to import grain. For its plenitude of paddy coastal Bengal could have been a credible contributor in this trade network. A definite indicator to this is found at the site of Chandraketugarh. It is an inscribed terracotta sealing, dating to the third century CE, which displays a sailing craft with stalks of grain (Chakravarti 1992, Mukherjee 1990, 2014: 40). The following observation of Sharmi Chakraborty in this context, for determining the spatial design of early historic settlements in and around Chandraketugarh, is worth mentioning (Chakraborty 2002: 154–55):



Until very recently boats were most



important vehicles of communication in lower Bengal. The settlements could be connected only [emphasis ours] through the waterways. The linear pattern [of sites in this coastal tract] is noticed on River Ganga (Deulpota [22°12'04.97"N/ 88°09'21.35"E], Harinarayanpur [22°12'23.19"N/ 88°09'36.93"E], Pakurtala [22°21'01.02"N 88°07'06.16"E]), Adi Ganga channel (Boral [22°27'8.60"N/ 88°22'29.40"E], Atghara [22°21'13.60"N/ 88°27'54.80"E]) and River Bidyadhari (Mochpol [22°44'10.94"N/ 88°26'58.03"E], Chandraketurgh, Gopalpur [22°35'27.34"N/ 88°40'18.02"E] and Bhangankhali [22°16'54.38"N/ 88°41'5.83"E]--further downstream after River Bidyadhari has joined River Matla). This pattern connects well with Ptolemy's account of five mouths, of River Ganga which were important for trade. Those five channels might have been used

by the traders to go upstream. The settlements might have grown on the banks of these in response to the trade route. Therefore, the linear pattern might be also a product of trade.

This is applicable not just for Roman trade but also coastal trade in general and also riverine trade throughout Bengal. Farakka and Wari Bateshwar to the north of the delta were perhaps important links to the chain.

In the larger economic chain of the eastern Indian Ocean domain, thus, boats seem to have taken a pivotal role. Numismatic evidence from the site, further, upholds this opinion.





Top: Punch-marked coins with boat device from Chandraketugarh (courtesy of Chandraketugarh Museum)

Two silver punch-marked coins are found from Chandraketugarh, which shows the figures of boat along with other regular devices. This portrayal on the coins, therefore, implies that this vehicle was used not only to ferry merchandise from the port to the sites in the hinterland, but were also used as a major mode of transport regularly.

An inscribed terracotta sealing, assigned to the third century CE palaeographically, is found also from Chandraketugarh which represents a ship on board containing the figure of a horse. It is the earliest known image of maritime



transportation of horse from an Indian port. The type of the vessel depicted in the sealing is inscribed as *trapyaka* (Chakravarti 1992: 157, Mukherjee 2014: 46–47, 119). We learn from the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and the fourth-century Jain text *Āṅgavijjā* as well, that the trappaga/ tappaka type of vessels were meant to glide along the sea bank (Chakravarti 1992: 157).

Dispersal of archaeological sites circumjacent to the ports at Chandraketugarh and Tamluk

suggested them to be 'early historic' nodes essentially in the organised structure of eastern Indian Ocean exchange networks, with outstretched hinterlands as well as a strong dwelling base. We, before starting discourse on the three early medieval ports of eastern-southeastern Bengal in present-day Bangladesh, may therefore wind up our discussion of this section with a note on the early medieval situation that these two port sites might have witnessed.

Discovery of a triratha brick structure along with associated structural and artefactual assemblages of the early medieval period

in the excavations at the Khanamihirerdhipi site at Chandraketugarh possibly phasise a shift

in the character of the settlement, at least in this specific sector of the site. One is, however, barred from perceiving a transparent view of the spatial or compositional configuration of this site in the early medieval period (for a collation of the scantily published data, Haque 1996) due to a glaring lack of systematic publication of the excavated material from the site. The situation at Tamluk, however, needs a closer scrutiny.

It is mentioned previously that around the eighth century CE as a consequence of the hydrographical changes in the western part of the Gangetic delta, resulting in gradual silting of the Rupnarayan river, on which it stood the port of Tāmralipta is believed to have diminished (c.f. Ray 1979). Predominant inference of Tāmralipta's growing prosperity till the eighth century CE is well synchronized after a closer examination of recent archaeological discoveries. A critical morphological analysis of a long, conical, medially luted, ringed storage vessel, found from a place somewhere near the village of Kalindi in the Ramnagar Police Station of the Purba Medinipur district leads to the derivation of the archaeological document. A group of archaeologists, on the basis of this



study, argue that in the whole of the east coast of India it is the one and only evidence of a complete and well-preserved specimen of a proper Mediterranean Amphora (Gangopadhyay, Selvakumar and Maiti

2017). Reportedly, another 'looks like Amphora' variety of this vessel, discovered from the site of Karanji near Bahiri, possibly reflects early medieval linkages aligning the west coast.

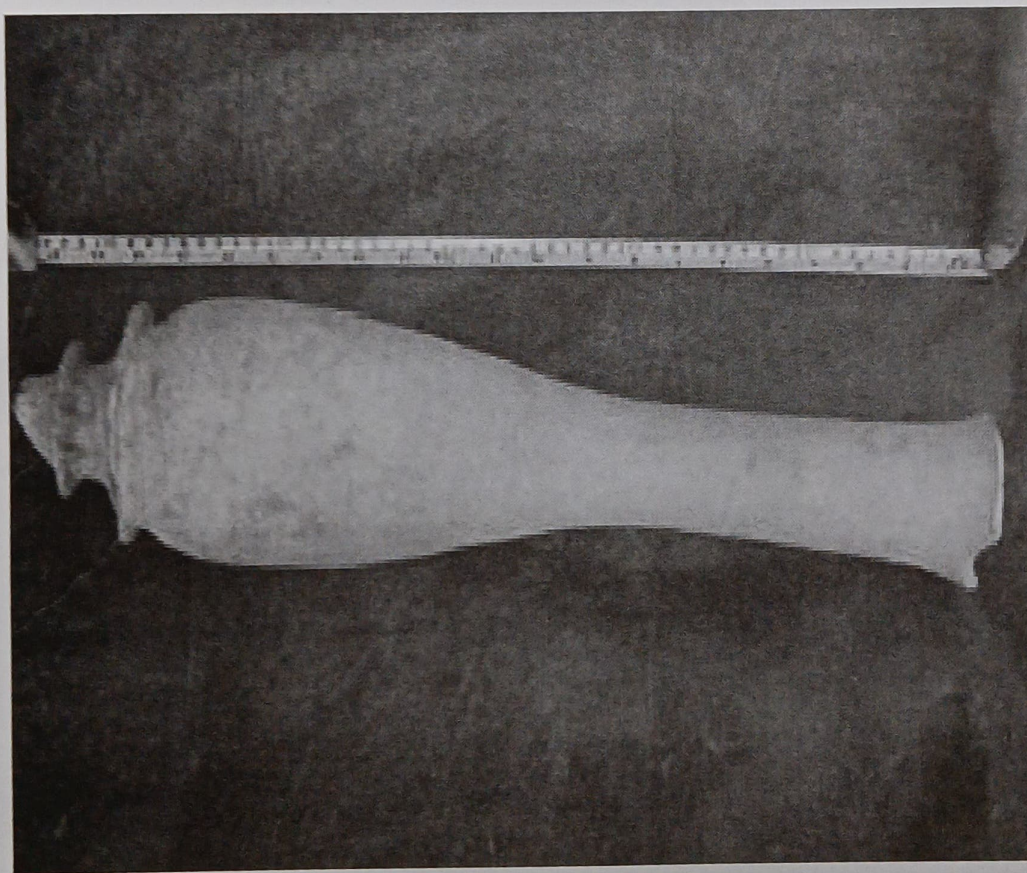
Archaeologists, on the basis of morphological characteristics, identified it as a 'South Arabian Jar' (Gangopadhyay et al. 2017), or more precisely as 'Islamic earthenware jar' (Tomber 2008: 129),

Occurring at sites in the southern regions of the Arabian Peninsula. Is this, by any chance, an indication of an interrelation of this sector of coastal West Bengal with the Greater Yemen region? Though without any detectable context it is too early to draw any conclusion on the basis of a lone find, the possibility, at the same time, should not be ruled out. A ceramic repertoire from the monastic site at Moghalmari (Datta 2008, Sanyal 2018), bearing observable typological similarity with pottery excavated from Bahiri

Left: South Arabian jar from Karanji, East Medinipur (courtesy of Rajanikanta Sangrahashala, Dharas, Medinipur)

(Gangopadhyay and Chatterjee 2017: 74), also provided potential evidence of Bengal's association with Southeast Asia in the early medieval period (Sanyal and Ghosh 2018). It can, therefore, clearly be concluded from the archaeological findings that until around eighth century the region around these sites, very much within the larger spatial trajectory of the site of Tamluk, served as parts of a strong hinterland that might have triggered and sustained the commercial linkages of the port of Tāmralipta.

Below: South Arabian jar from Karanji, East Medinipur (courtesy of Rajanikanta Sangrahashala, Dharas, Medinipur)



PORTS OF EASTERN-SOUTH EASTERN BENGAL

We have to shift our gaze, in the early medieval period, to two distinct subregions of Bengal in modern

Bangladesh, where Samandar was the presiding seaport in the modern Chittagong coast. Devaparvata (in Comilla district of Bangladesh) in south-eastern Bengal and Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka (somewhere near Sabhar) in eastern Bengal could be the two riverine or feeder ports which served the port of Samandar. From remote times these ports covering the Ganga delta and the trans-Meghna zone up to the south-easternmost portions of Bangladesh, were suitable for ideal linkages with Southeast

Asia. Moreover, the delta, with its rich agrarian tracts and the fluvial network nurtured by these ports, provided the necessary connectivity.

The Moroccan traveller al Idrīsī, in 'The delight of those who seek to wander through the regions of the world' (Nuzhatu-l Mushtak) of the mid-twelfth century CE, writes (Elliot and Dowson 1867: 90):

Samandár is a large town, commercial, and rich, and where there are good profits to be made [...] it stands upon a river which comes from the country of Kashmír. Rice

and various grains, especially excellent wheat, are to be obtained here. Aloe wood is brought hither from the country of Kármút [Kamrúp?] 15 days' distance, by a river of which the waters are sweet. The aloe wood which comes from this country is of a superior quality and of a delicious

perfume [...]. One day's sail from this city, there is a large island well peopled and frequented by merchants of all countries [...].

A large part of his work is based on the *Kitābu-l Masālik Wa-l Mamālik* (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms). This book was composed by Ibn Khurdādbain the late ninth century CE, who also wrote about Samandar (**Elliot and Dowson ibid.:33**). Samandar's identity as a premier port of southeastern Bengal at that time is pointed to in the descriptions of al Idrīsī. Thus, we may assume that by the mid-ninth century CE, Arabic and Persian writers became attentive towards both the sea and its port; and those became essential parts of the Arab geographical world.

Being the only port in the territory, the port of Samandar in Harikela had a vast hinterland in the Ganga and Brahmaputra valleys. As no reference to the port of Tāmralipta after the eighth century is available till date, it may be presumed that to travel across the Bay of Bengal, people from Southeast Asia visiting these areas or vice versa had the only option to use the port for their journey. In a move to expand the Srivijayan network Śrīvijaya sent a mission to the Pāla court in Bengal in the first half of the ninth century (Majumdar 1941, Sastri 1942: 92-103). It must have been the port of Samandar through which the network was to connect as at that time Western Bengal did not possess any port. Cleping a sea after a particular unit—Harikela—shows the importance of the locale as well as its popularity among the seafarers of the time (Chakravarti, 2002, Ghosh, 2014, Mukherjee 1982: 65-83).

For connections between the countries across the **Bay of Bengal** (the name itself signifies the importance of maritime trade history of Bengal through ages) this port was used as a transit trade zone. The location at the confluence of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra meant that merchants used it as an entrepôt. Thus, around 1120 CE in Marvazi's account of Bengal when it is averred that among the 'many lands' under the king DHM is 'a town called H.DKĪRA with a market' and again that 'in a town called H.DKIRA [identified with Harikela] business is carried on by means of gold (coins) and cowrie shells, but the latter are more



Top: Cowrie-shells from Paikar, Birbhum district (courtesy Rajat Sanyal)

in use—' (Minorsky 1942: 48, 148), we know that from Maldives these shells reached Harikela and was transferred naturally to the hinterlands in the

dominion of the Pāla-Sena, where cowry was much used as a parallel currency (Yang 2011: 317–342). Demand for cowries in Bengal is further testified from the account of Ibn Battūta.

Mal-cowrie (cowrie from the Maldives), Cowrie diyekinlam (purchased at the cost of Cowrie), phelo Cowrie makhotel (cowrie to buy oil), Kana-cowrie-o dhardharina (not borrowed even an invalid cowrie), and other proverbs and expressions are still used by the people of Bengal today. Personal names like ek-cowrie, du-cowrie, tin-cowrie, panch-cowrie, sat-cowrie, na-cowrie, etc. that combine variable numbers (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, etc.) with the common element, the cowry, also contain the cowrie. Additionally, cowrie is utilised in Hindu marriage rites in Bengal. During cremation, cowries are used as it is paid as a small token for the deceased person's boat voyage across the "Vaitarani" river. Additionally, cowries are used in Bengal in the worship of Goddess Laxmi.

Chittagong, in the navigational guides of mariners like Aḥmad b. Mājīd al-Najdī of the early fifteenth century CE, is described as a great port in Bengal (Tibbetts 1971: 395). Chittagong's function as an entrepôt is also validated by the visit of an imperial Chinese navy in 1405 CE. We can suggest that for distant trade in the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal as early as the ninth century CE Chittagong's commencement as a central port had happened after the emergence of Samandar as a port of Bahr Harkand. As a port of Bahr Harkand Samandar/Sudkawan, reaching out to distant lands and exhibiting a vibrant economic network with a perfect balance of coined money and cowrie currency, continued its association with both

hinterland agricultural producers and foreland seafarers. Kāmarūpa (Assam), Arakan (present Rakhine in Myanmar) and extensive areas in the Ganga valley were clasped by the hinterland of this port. We also have indirect proof to stipulate that in the network of Samandar there existed other ports of Southeast Asia (Ghosh 2019).

With Kāmarūpa (present Assam), an important hinterland of Samandar, we may begin the discussion. This region was famous for aloes wood, black aloes in particular and yak tails which were both ritual items regardless all religions like Buddhism, Brahmanism and Islam. The account of Arab geographer mentioned about premium quality aloes wood from Kāmarūpa and rates it second to the wood of Multan, which in turn corroborates the presence of aloes wood in a large scale in Kāmarūpa. Yak tail and rhinoceros' horn were also referred to by them as important commodities of the kingdom of DHM. According to Al Idrīsī (in 1162 CE) from Kāmarūpa aloes wood was brought to Samandar in a fifteen-day journey by a river identifiable with the Brahmaputra (Chakravarti 2002: 165–167). Communications and linkages of southeastern Bengal with Kāmarūpa in the Brahmaputra valley seems to be apparent if one takes into account the travels of Ibn Battūta in Bengal in the first half of the fourteenth century. One should keep in mind that from Sudkawan or the port of Chittagong (which could be in all likelihood Samandar) he began a long journey to Habang or Habiganj in Sylhet via Kāmarūpa. He stated that this route is used by commuters to Bengal and Laknawati (Gibbs 1997: 267–271). If Ibn Battūta could take this itinerary around

the fourteenth century, it was quite plausible that the route was active since earlier times.

Further, we may put Kalasapura, generally identified with the present port of Martaban in Myanmar, and Karmaraṅga within this broader network of Kāmarūpa and Harikela. P. Pelliot and G. H. Luce have identified the name of the place as Kalasapura, the 'city of pots' mentioned in the eleventh-century text *Kathāsaritsāgara*, as a coastal town of Suvarṇadvīpa (Luce 1969–70: 1, 20, n. 58, Gutman 2002). The *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* of about the eighth century in at least three verses refers to Harikela, Karmaraṅga and Kalasapura together. According to the text Kāmarūpa (Assam), Harikela (Chittagong), Karmaraṅga (Arakan) and Kalasapura (Martaban) are connected terrains (Griffiths 2015: 281–340). One may note that Martaban is famous for its ceramic tradition, particularly the jars, which in Sanskrit are called *kalasa*. Being an important port in southern Myanmar and the nature of the ceramics produced there gave the Martaban jar its name. Thus, through textual references and travel tales of Ibn Battūta we perceive the connected history of the ports in the Bay of Bengal.

The port of Samandar could be linked with the two riverine ports of Devaparvata and Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka. In the inscriptional records of southeastern Bengal from the seventh century mentions of Devaparvata are seen. While throughout the seventh–eighth centuries it was primarily an administrative headquarter under some ruling families of the territory (Morrison 1970: 34–41), with its four

main entrances and encircled by the river Kṣīrodā (modern Khirnai) it also operated as a riverine port (Chakravarti 1996: 565). Again in the late-tenth century we trace reappearance of Devaparvata in the records of the time of Śricandra. It explicitly refers to the hilly tracts of the Lalmai (*Lāmbivana*) area being frequented by boatmen (*nāvikas*), which unquestionably props up our argument that Devaparvata was an active riverine port of the southeastern sub region at least till the tenth century. Again we must note here that copious references to the currency of the seaport at Samandar are found among Arab geographers by the ninth century.

Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka, the second riverport, must have acted as a feeder of the port of Samandar. It finds a singular but nevertheless significant reference in the Madanpur copperplate of time of Śricandra, another tenth century charter of the Candra family (Basak 1958, Sircar 1958). Ranabir Chakravarti identified Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka with Sabhar, an archaeological site 17 miles north-west of Dhaka, near which the copperplate was discovered. The site was a riverine port situated on the conflux of Vaṁśāvatī (Vamsai) and the Dhaleswari rivers. It was a centre of Buddhism. From this site a large number of clay moulded tablets with Bodhisattva images Buddhist stone and bronze sculptures have been found. Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka seems to have worked as an inland riverine exchange centre, which offered warehousing facilities and provided fluvial associations to the Bay of Bengal (*vaṅgasāgara*). In Chakravarti's view, discovery of the Madanpur copperplate of Śricandra from the Sabhar

region, 'may therefore strongly suggest that a *sambhāṇḍāriyaka* (a trade centre with warehousing facilities) could very well have existed at Sabhar in the early medieval times' (Chakravarti 1996: 559, 2002: 151).

An administrative centre called Nāvyavakāśikā, meaning a new opening or a channel, is mentioned in an earlier inscription from Vaṅga (Pargiter 1910, 1911, Sircar 1965: 363–72). Such channels were mostly navigable and must have had offered additional communication with Vaṅga and the littoral areas. This connection also comes alive from a recent study of a hoard discovered from the village Sandip near Sabhar. Fifteen gold coins, found inside the hoard, of the Samataṭa type suggest that these type of coins were in circulation even after the introduction of the Gupta gold coins from the Vaṅga sub-region of early Bengal (Islam 2015). This affirms trade connection between Vaṅga and Samataṭa. From around the sixth century CE until at least the tenth century CE Sabhar was an important trading centre. One can still see boats laden with merchandise plying on the river Sitalakshya from Dhaka towards Barishal.

Epilogue: Reflection of Maritime history in indigenous Bangla Literature

The literature of Bengal has been significantly shaped by its prominent maritime history. Works like *Manasāmaṅgala* and *Caṇḍīmaṅgala Kāvya*, which focus on the indigenous goddesses of Bengal, tell the tales of Cād Sadāgar and Dhanapati Sadāgar, both from the *Gandha Vaṇika* community

১৪২	মনসাবিজয়
২	সপ্তমে মেলিল ডিলা নামে শশিমুখী
পয়ার	বহু দূর হৈতে আর ছইল দেখি ।
গন্ধেশ্বরী প্রথমে বরিল সাবধানে	রাজবাটী রামেশ্বর বাহিয়া এড়ায়
অনেক ছাগল করিয়া বলিদানে ।	ধর্মখান বাহিয়া অজয়-নদী পায় ।
সনকারে প্রবোধ করিয়া নৃপবর	উজবনি বাহিয়া হইল উপনীত
শুভকণ্ঠে বুদ্ধি মেলিল নরেশ্বর ।	শিব-নদী সাজাই বাহিল স্বরাধিত ।
দ্বিতীয় মেলিল ডিলা নামে সর্বজয়	উজনি কাটোয়া বাহি রহে ইন্দ্র-বাটে
হু-লক্ষ তসার দ্রব্য তাহাতে ভরিয়া ।	ইন্দ্র-চরণ পুছে সেই নদী-তটে ।

which is part of the merchant class of Bengal. The *Manasāmaṅgala Kāvya* tradition encompasses authors spanning from Kānā Haridatta in the 13th century to Vipradās Pipilāi and Vijaygupta in the 15th century, and Ketakādāsa Kṣemānanda in the 16th century, among others. In the 'Vaṇik-khaṇḍa' section of *Caṇḍīmaṅgala*, there is a depiction of a tribute exchange between the King of the region and Dhanapati Sadāgar, symbolizing Dhanapati Sadāgar's acquisition of political influence as a trusted ally of the king. In contrast, the *Manasāmaṅgala* primarily revolved around an exchange-based economy for the import and export of goods.

Trade and commerce between Sri Lanka and India have been documented in literary sources dating back to the 5th century CE. This is further supported by various versions of Bengali narrative poetry about Goddess *Manasā* and *Caṇḍī* spanning different centuries in Bengal's history. The stories of *Mansā* and *Caṇḍī* have their roots in oral tradition, with episodes reflecting different time periods. For instance, the narratives of Cād and Dhanapati can be traced back to at least

Top : Cād Sadāgar performs worship of Goddess *Gandheśvarī* before the trade journey, which is a ritual to be observed by the *Gandha Vaṇika* community
Source: *Manasā-Vijaya* by Vipradās Pipilāi (ed. Sukumar Sen, The Asiatic Society, 1953 Bengal; Chandraketurgarh 3rd Century B.C

CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF VIJAYA

In the country of the Vaṅgas¹ in the Vaṅga capital there 1
lived once a king of the Vaṅgas. The daughter of the king
of the Kalīṅgas was that king's consort. By his spouse the 2
king had a daughter, the soothsayers prophesied her union
with the king of beasts. Very fair was she and very amorous 3
and for shame the king and queen could not suffer her.

Alone she went forth from the house, desiring the joy of 4
independent life; unrecognized she joined a caravan travelling
to the Magadha country. In the Lāṅka country a lion attacked 5
the caravan in the forest, the other folk fled this way and that,
but she fled along the way by which the lion had come.

When the lion had taken his prey and was leaving the spot 6
he beheld her from afar, love (for her) laid hold on him, and
he came towards her with waving tail and ears laid back.
Seeing him she bethought her of that prophecy of the sooth- 7
sayers which she had heard, and without fear she caressed him
stroking his limbs.

The lion, roused to fiercest passion by her touch, took her 8
upon his back and bore her with all speed to his cave, and
there he was united with her, and from this union with 9
him the princess in time bore twin-children, a son and a
daughter.

The son's hands and feet were formed like a lion's and there- 10
fore she named him Sīhabāhu, but the daughter (she named)
Sīhasvatī. When he was sixteen years old the son questioned 11
his mother on the doubt (that had arisen in him): 'Where-
fore are you and our father so different, dear mother?' She 12
told him all. Then he asked: 'Why do we not go forth (from
here)?' And she answered: 'Thy father has closed the cave
up with a rock.' Then he took that barrier before the great 13

¹ I.e., Bengal.

2

9195

Top: First page of
the 6th chapter of
Mahāvamsa named
'The coming of
Vijaya'

Image source: The
Mahāvamsa or The
great chronicle of
Ceylon by Wilhelm
Geiger

Top Right:
Iconographies of
Goddess Manasā of
10th century
source: Haque
Emanul. 2007

Right Middle:
Iconographies of
Goddess Manasā of
12th century
source: Haque
Emanul. 2000

in the 7th and 8th centuries. Evidence of the cultural exchanges between Bengal and Sri Lanka can also be found in the 6th and 7th chapters of Mahāvamsa, a Pāli text listed as an item of documentary heritage on the UNESCO's Memory of the World International Register in 2023. The 6th chapter of Mahāvamsa recounts the arrival of Vijaya, the prince-regent of the Bengal king Sīhabāhu, in Sri Lanka accompanied by a retinue of seven hundred followers. (laṁkāyaṁ Vijayasanaṁako kumāro / otiṇṇo thiramati tamvapaṇṇidese / sālānaṁ yamakaguṇānaṁ antarammiṁ "The Prince named Vijaya, the valiant, landed in Laṁkā, in the region called Tambapaṇṇi on the day that the Tathāgata lay down between the two twin-like sāla-trees to pass into nibbāṇa") This is further substantiated in the 7th chapter as Tathāgata Buddha, on the bed of his nirvāṇa (nibbāṇa), while speaking to Sakka, a name of Indra—the king of the gods, says—"Bijaya, son of king Sīhabāhu, is come to Laṁkā from the country of Lāṅka

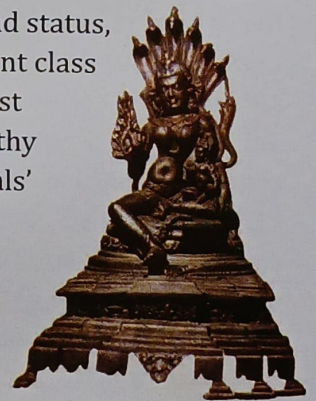
the 8th century AD, a time when the port of Tāmralipta (modern-day Tamluk) was thriving. Similarly, the Jalu-Malu episode of Manasāmaṅgala likely emerged after the Turkish invasion of Bengal in the late 12th century. Additionally, iconographic evidence suggests that the visual representation of Caṇḍī and Manasā began to take shape

(i.e. Rāṛha), together with seven hundred followers. In Laṁkā, O lord of gods, will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Laṁkā." (Geiger 1912: 54-55)

Keeping in mind the entire maritime history of ancient Bengal we can easily assume why the main theme of Bengali medieval literature centres around the merchant societies of Bengal and their voyages. Even the goddesses like Manasā and Caṇḍī to fulfil their social aspirations and status, targeted the merchant class as they were the most influential and wealthy component of Bengals' social strata.

In his book titled Poetry and History: Bengali Maṅgal-kābya and Social

Change in Precolonial Bengal, David L Curley discusses the portrayal of merchants and their activities in the Bengali poem Caṇḍīmaṅgala by Mukunda Chakravartī, a Brāhmaṇ author from the sixteenth century. The poem was likely to be written in the second half of the sixteenth century and was created with the support of the Brāhmaṇ ruler of Brāhmaṇbhūm, located in the undivided Medinīpur region.



The way this poem imagines merchants and their activities should help us see how people in the courts of local rājās ('little kings'), whose authority generally was qualified by their allegiance to an

overlord, saw them, at least some of the time and their perceptions in turn were part of the world at least of local Hindu merchants. (Curley, 2008). The poets of these two different Maṅgalkāvyas mentioned about the port Saptagrām, which was in operation in the 15th and 16th century Bengal. Actually, the Mansā and Caṇḍīmaṅgala tradition of medieval Bengali literature is a direct reflection of its conscious memory borne by oral literary tradition and this memory got its written shape from the 13th century onwards.

Both Vipradāsa's "Manasā Vijaya" and Mukunda's "Caṇḍīmaṅgala Kavya" provide vivid depictions of trade journeys and include detailed accounts of import and export activities. It is important to note that these poems were composed during different periods, with "Manasā Vijaya" dating back to the fifteenth century and "Caṇḍīmaṅgala Kavya" being written approximately one hundred to one hundred and fifty years later, in the

Top Left: Iconography of goddess caṇḍī of 8th century

Bottom: Terracotta plaque at Lakshmivaraha temple, Vagrui, West Midnapore, showing image of Kamalekāmīnī darśana as depicted in Candīmangala





Top:
Another terracotta
plaque at
Lakshmivara
temple, Karkai,
West Midnapore,
showing image
of Kamalekāmī
darśana

sixteenth century. Despite this temporal gap, they share striking similarities in the goods traded, indicating a historical authenticity to the trade accounts. This suggests that the portrayal of trade

journeys was not merely a product of poetic imagination, but rather a reflection of the actual trade practices of their respective times. These poems serve as a testament to the enduring legacy of

Bengal's once-thriving trade, immortalized by poets from different eras.

ষষ্ঠ দিবস		
নিশা		
০৩১		
লক্ষ্মী বাইন্যাসি	মকল দিয়া জরফানি	দুইতক আইয় খানি
দুইতক লক্ষ বীণা	বাজনে পুজেন তরশী।	মুখর তেরি নানা
করিয়া তানে সুখ	করিল হস্তিক বাচন	কুসের দ্বিজবর
অরোণি হেঁথটে	গণেশ কইল আবাহন।	মুগল করপুটে
দৈবিক্য নানা বিধি	খণ্ড মধু পানি	শোল উপচারে চণ্ডী পুজেন খুচনা
দর্পক পূরি হেমখাল	অমোঘে পুরি খাল	প্রদক্ষিণ করি বারি করেন অর্চনা।
সৌকর রসাল	জালিল রত্নলীপমালা।	জগতজননী জয়া কৃপা কর যোরে
করিয়া সুতক	চন্দর দর্পণ	সমুদ্রে তরঙ্গ নাথে আনিবে মলিনে।
বীণ কেরআলে	তরীখবজ আগে বাজে	মহুকৈতের ভয়ে রত্নার দরণ
গায়ার গাবরে	ই ফুল কলসোলে	দুর্বারে গীত পুর হইল দেবদাস।
চিরারে প্রদক্ষিণ	পুজিল দিয়া পুষ্পগন্ধে।	সুরসোকে সুস্থির করিলে সুরসার
প্রিয়মুখ	কল কুণ্ডল চন্দনে	প্রথমে সন্ধান পাইলে ইন্দের সতায়।
তার সতসল	করিয়া দুঃসাতন	রাবণের বধহেতু সকল দেবতা
	আইল নিজ নিকটনে।	তোমারে বোদন কৈল অকালে বিদাতা।
	পূজ অকাত	শোল উপচারে পুজিল রত্ননাথ
	রাসিক হাথে সুধান	তবে রাবণ হইল সমরে নিপাত।
	প্রীতিবিকল্প গান ৯	নানাবিধ সামবাহ করেন খুচনা
		সদাগরে বার্তা দিতে চলিল লহনা।
		অভয়চরণে মধুক নিজ চিত
		প্রীতিবিকল্প গান মধুর সরাইত ৯
০৪০		
সমু বাজা কৈল দিন না কৈল বিচার	সদাগর জোয়ার সনে আছে বিল কখা	
খুচনার বশবিধ হইল অভকার।	জোয়ার মোহিনী বালা	দিক্ষা করে ডাইন-কলা
	নিজ পুখে ডাকিনী বেধতা।	
০৪১		

Right:
Textual description,
found in Caṇḍimaṇ-
gala, showing Some
trade rituals performed
before trade journey

১৯

পয়সার

সনকার বাক্য তিনি বলে নরপতি
কি করিতে পারে কনি তাহার শক্তি।
তথাএ রক্ষিবা আবা বাপু মহেশ্বর
নিজিবে থাকিহ ঘরে নাহি কোন ভয়।
সাজ সাজ সম্বরে জাকিল দুগবর
আদিল কাণ্ডারগণে নৌকার চাকর।

দুর্গত কাণ্ডারি প্রতি বলে হেন কালে
পুরাতন ডিঙ্গা আছে গুজড়ির জলে।
ভুবার আনিয়া ডিঙ্গা তুলিলেক কূলে
গাব হুনা দিয়া তরী ভাসাইল জলে।
বড়দড়ি টাকাইল মহা কোলাহলে
আনিতে ডিঙ্গার ব্রব্য দুগবর বলে।
তুলিল বাবু-কাট ডিঙ্গার উপর
নানা ব্রব্য কিনি ডিঙ্গা তরে দুগবর।

Left:
Textual description,
found in Manasāvi-
jaya, showing Some
trade rituals performed
before trade journey

১৪০

মনসাবিজয়

প্রচুর করিয়া লএ হুনা নারিকেল
খোম-গুতি বাসা আদি বসন সকল।
নিষপত্র হস্তাপাত আর কালা ভীরা
মেখি পাড়ু কুমুড়া জোয়ানি কৈল ভরা।
ভৈল দ্বত মাষ মুগ কলাই সকল
জতনে প্রচুর করি লইল তুল।
গণক আনিয়া লয় কৈল গুজড়ি
বিজ বিপ্রাশে বলে বনসা-চরণে ॥

পঞ্চ মাস গর্ত হবে সনকা রমণী
হেন কালে পাটনে চলিলা দুগমুনি।
পূত্র হয় খোবে নাম লক্ষ্মীর বালা
হুহিতা হইলে নাম খুইয় জয়বালা।
পত্র বিলা টাঙ্গো রাঙা লোকবর্ধ-ভর
বাঁজা করি পাটনে চলেন মহাশয়।
সমুখেতে পূর্ণ ঘট করি আরোপণ
পুরোহিতগণ বেধ করে উচ্চারণ।
নানা বাজ হুলাহুলি করে শঙ্খধ্বনি
বাঁজা করিয়া চলে টাঙ্গো দুগমুনি।
হাঁচি চেঁচি পড়ে হবে বাঁজা করে রায়
সনকা রমণী কর হানরে মাধার।
গুজড়ির কূলে গেলো টাঙ্গো অধিকারী
প্রভাতে বরিব ডিঙ্গা সনকা হুকরী।
এই সভাসতরে বনসা পুরো আশ

২০

ময়সার

হেনো কালে সনকা বলএ বিজ্ঞানে
পঞ্চ মাস গর্ত মোর কেহ নাহি জানে।
লোকবর্ধাচারে পাছে হয় অপমান

Export in Manasāmaṅgala & Caṇḍīmaṅgala	Import in Manasāmaṅgala & Caṇḍīmaṅgala
Jhunā nārikēla - বুনা নারিকেল	śāṅkha - শঙ্খ
pāṭa sōna - পাট সোন	labāṅga - লবঙ্গ
bhērā - ভেড়া	jāy phala - জায় ফল
Haridrā - হরিদ্রা	hiṅgula - হিংগুল
	dhabala cāmōra - ধবল চামর
	ghōṛā - ঘোড়া
	dānā karpūra - দানা কর্পূর

কি ঐস তেলস অঙ্গ বঙ্গ কর্ণাট
মহেন্দ্র মগধ মহীরাষ্ট্র গুজরাট।
বারেন্দ্র পল্লব বিজয় পিঙ্গল সফর
উৎকল দ্রাবিড় রাড়া বিজয়ানগর।
মথুরা ঝারিকা কালী কাণ্ডীপুর জয়া
প্রয়াগ কৌরবক্ষেত্র গোদাবরী গয়া।
ঠিহট কাঙুর কৌচ হরেন্দ্র শ্রীহট
মানিকা ফণিকা লঙ্কা প্রলয় নাকুট।
অগ্নি মলয়া দেশ কুম্ভক্ষেত্র নাম
বটেশ্বর আতুলকা স্থল সপ্তগ্রাম।
সিলাহট্ট মহীহট্ট হস্তিনা নগরী
আর সফর কত যলিবারে নারি।
এ সব সফরে জত সদাগর বৈসে
জঙ্গ ডিঙ্গা লইয়া তারা বাণিজ্যেরে আইসে।
সপ্তগ্রামের বণিক কোথাহ না জায়
ঘরে বসায় সুখমোক্ষ নানা ধন পায়।
তীর্থ মধ্যে পুণ্য তীর্থ কিত্তি অনুপায়
সপ্ত-ঋষির শাসন বলায় সপ্তগ্রাম।

Left:
Port Saptagrām mentioned in
Caṇḍīmaṅgala

Concluding Remarks

It is clear from the forgoing that in case of early Bengal, which was an amalgamation of several subregions, the two seaports at Tāmralipta and Samandar dominated the different periods of history (Morrison 1970). Tāmralipta was vibrant in Western Bengal as an early historical port.

Samandar, on the other hand, thrived in Southeastern Bengal in the early medieval period. For a long period of time these two areas with their feeder ports survived and became prosperous through the rich hinterlands and communications. In case of Tāmralipta, we also notice the linkage between the upland hills and the lowland port. Various references found in texts and remains from archaeological explorations also suggest Tāmralipta's direct contacts with regions of Southeast Asia and an indirect association with the Graeco-Roman or western world presumably.

With a regular traffic of men and merchandise along with a terrestrial as well as strong fluvial communication network with its hinterlands the port of Samandar was indeed a port town having regions of Southeast Asia largely as its foreland. In case of these ports we must not miss the interlocking of the coast with the inland. A study of these two ports, thus, needs to place them in the larger ambit of interaction between Bengal and specific areas of Southeast Asia.

The Manasamangal & Chandimangal tradition of mediaval Bangla literature is a direct reflection of its conscious memory borne by oral literary tradition and this memory got its written shape from the 13th Century onwards.

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Chapter Six

Political History of Sovereign Bengal: From Śaśāṅka to Pāla-Sena Era

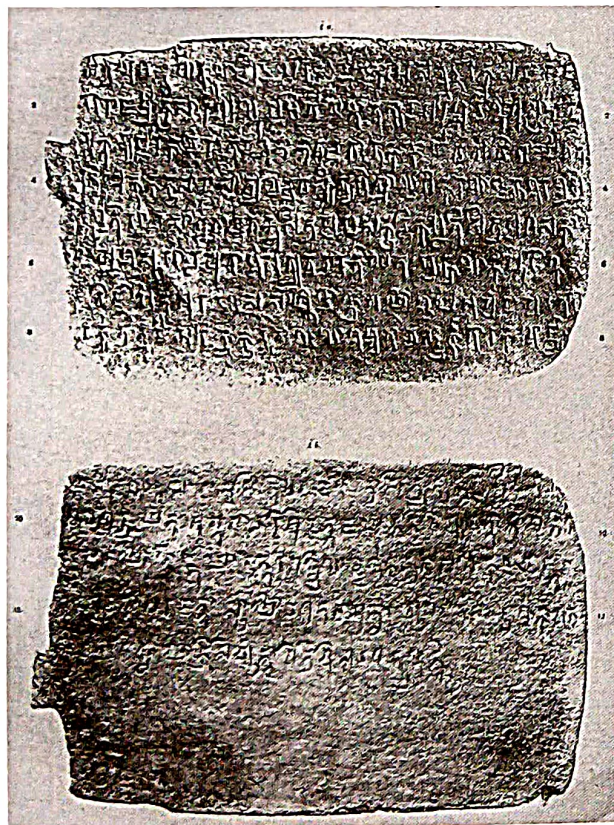
Rajat Sanyal

[Courtesy: Sanyal, Rajat. 2014. The Pala-Sena and Others. In D.K. Chakrabarti and Makkhan Lal (eds.) *Political History and Administration (c. AD 750-1300)*, Vol. V. New Delhi: Aryan Books International]



Damodarpur Copper-
Plates of Kumāragupta

Image Source:
Epigraphia Indica, Vol.
XV, p. 132



Political history of Bengal under Gupta domination in the fifth century is more or less coterminous with the political history of northern Bengal under the provincial administrative division called Puṇḍravarddhana *bhukti*. All the rulers from Kumāragupta to Viṣṇugupta ruled in this sector of the delta with their administrative headquarters at the districts of either Koṭivarṣa (modern Rajibpur area of the South Dinajpur District of West Bengal) to the west or at Pancanagari (modern Panchbibi in the Jaypurhat district of Bangladesh) to the east. The existence of a lineage having Datta name ending is consistently supported by references to names like Cirātadatta, Brahmadatta and Jayadatta in four of the five Damodarpur copperplates. Quite interestingly all of them held the post of *Uparika*, i.e., provincial administrators and the latter two are

also found to have assumed the epithet *mahārāja*. D.C. Sircar's hunch that they might have been the descendants of Nāgadatta, one of the rulers of Aryavartta defeated by

Samudragupta, seems justifiable and relevant (Sircar 1985a: 141-2). However, this north Bengal-centric political structure soon assumes a highly fluid and fast changing shape between the sixth and the mid eighth century phase distinctly marked by the rise and fall of a number of local polities not only within the historically defined delta consisting of modern West Bengal and Bangladesh, but also to the areas beyond it into parts of Bihar and Odisha. In terms of empirical records in the form of primary epigraphical texts, the fluid contours of the local geopolitical frames of Bengal before the rise of the Pāla can be underlined *prima facie* on the basis of three separate groups of copperplate inscriptions dated between the early sixth and the early eighth centuries. These records bear testimony to political developments underlining the inception of the early medieval phase in Bengal and can be visualized from the distribution of copper-plates within the historical boundaries of Bengal and the contiguous sectors of northern Odisha. Of these three groups, the first can be safely dated to the sixth century when Mahārāja Vainyagupta was still having his administrative seat in AD 507/8 at Kripura in The Brahmanberia sector of southeastern Bengal.¹

Till date, the historical identity of this king was known primarily on the basis of the isolated copperplate from Gunaighar. But the recent rediscovery and decipherment of another copperplate of the reign of the king by Ryosuke Furui tend to completely alter one's understanding of the early history of Bengal. The plate is currently under the possession of a private collector in Dhaka and presumably hails from the

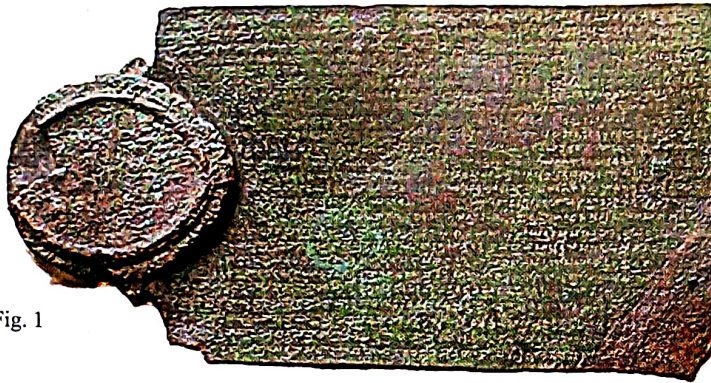


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Comilla region. The inscription is dated in the Gupta era 184 (= AD 503/4) belonging to the reign of *pañcādhikaraṇoparika-mahāpratīhāramahārāja* Vainyagupta who is also described as *paramabhaṭṭāraka-pādānudhyāta*.² Here Vainyagupta copies and by implication reapproves a grant made nearly a century earlier in the Gupta year 91 (= 410/1) by Mahārāja Maheśvara Nāthacandra. Land plots are acquired through purchase, donation and so on at 17 settlements in *Jayanāṭana* of *Pūrva maṇḍala*, while another plot is from a settlement in *Dakṣiṇa maṇḍala*.

While this record is of manifold significance for the study of early social-political and religious history of Bengal for which one should await the published version of the record by its decipherer, some of the readily understandable points that emerge from the inscription are: first and foremost, although the current form of the inscription is dated to early sixth century, it contains the earliest record of permanent land alienation in Bengal, as it predates the Dhanaidaha copperplate of Gupta era 113 (=c. AD 432/3),

the earliest copperplate inscription so

Fig. 1 & Fig. 2

A New Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta, year 184 GE, Obverse.

Image Source: Ryosuke Furui, "Ājivakas, Mañibhadra and Early History of Eastern Bengal", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, vol. 26, no. 4, p. 658



Dhanidaha Copperplate Inscription of Kumāragupta I

Image Source: *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII, p. 393

far reported, by more than two decades. Secondly, it proves that as early as the early fifth century a king named Nathachandra ruled in the Jayanatana area of the Comilla sector of southeastern Bengal where the districts of Peranatana and Guptinatana had developed by the seventh century as prominent regional administrative centres. Thirdly, this is the only inscriptional evidence recovered from Bengal where re-appropriation of a previously issued grant is recorded. Fourthly, this is again the sole charter from Bengal where, apart from land, a number of valuables in the form of ritual objects in metal and ivory are recorded to have been donated to a religious institution. It may be noted here that the place name Jayanatna appears as the name of an administrative unit belonging to Pūrva maṇḍala on one hand and of a settlement where the shrine is located and some witnesses reside on the other. Finally, it is the only primary source, so far available from Bengal, for the study of the Ajivika sect and the cult of Manibhadra. Publication of this inscription with detailed interpretative analysis of its decipherer is expected to mark a major shift in the currently prevailing paradigm of understanding the early history of Bengal.

The four other rulers of this group, viz. Dvādaśāditya, Dharmāditya, Gopacandra, and Samācāradeva, are known to have been operating with their power base principally at the Vāraka-maṇḍala viśaya in the Vaṅga region comprising the Kotalipara sector of the present Gopalganj (former Faridpur) district.³ While the local developments in and around Faridpur in the eastern sector of the delta under all these four rulers is empirically

convincing with consistent issuance of copperplate charters and coins, the more intriguing issue is the extension of Gopacandra's power in the central alluvial tracts of West Bengal and in the Odisha adjoining southwestern sectors which had already assumed distinct province (*bhukti*) level administrative identities as Varddhamāna *bhukti* and Daṇḍa *bhukti* respectively, as revealed from the Mallasarul and the Jayrampur plates. However, D.C. Sircar's observation that Samataṭa was also under the political dominance of Gopacandra demands further empirical support (Sircar 1985b: 111).⁴ The second line of development, which was aligned more closely with southeastern Bengal and areas beyond along the trans-Meghna routes rather than the mainstream political milieu of the Gangetic plains, took place under three major lineages like the Rāta, the Khadga and the Deva in the Comilla-Noakhali-Chattagram regions across the trans-Meghna corridor. Sāmanta Lokanātha is isolated epigraphic evidence from the Tippera foothills shows that he was operating from the Suvvunga viśaya (which is still unidentified on ground) and was a contemporary of Jivadharaṇarāta, the predecessor of Śrīdharaṇarāta who assumed the title of lord of Samataṭa (*Samataṭeśvara*) and ruled from his headquarters at Devaparvata in the southern foothills of Mainamati range in the Comilla region in the third quarter of the seventh century. The proper political and chronological status of the Sāmanta Muruṇḍanātha with one inscription from Kalapur also remains problematic. So far, the knowledge about Śrīdharaṇarāta was based solely on the Kailan copperplate, but the recent discovery of a set of three⁵ copperplates from the village of Uriswar

in the southern Pararpur sector of the Comilla district records grant of land in the same Guptinatana district where lands will be again donated a couple of years later according to the Kailan plate. The Khaḍga rulers established power in Samataṭa with a power base at Karmamānta (i.e., modern Barkamta/Barkanta near Comilla proper) under Devakhaḍga. Our information on this lineage is based principally on the two plates of this king from Ashrafpur and one from the Comilla area, often named as the Devaparvata plate. Out of the eight copperplates discovered from Salban Vihāra, four are certainly known to belong to this Devakhaḍga and his sons Rājabhāṭa and Balabhāṭa. While the Ashrafpur plates were issued from his office at Karmamānta, all the later plates were issued from a place other than Karmamānta or any other known administrative centre in the area, as Morrison's notes confirm (Morrison 1970: 37).⁶ The only definite evidence on the date of this family, as recovered by Sircar, is supplied by the travelogue of the Chinese traveller Sheng-chi who found the devout Buddhist Rājabhāṭa (alias Rājarāja) on the royal seat of Samataṭa in the third quarter of the seventh century (Sircar 1985b: 146-47).⁷ The issue of political dominance, chronology and interrelationship of the members of the Deva families of Samataṭa-Harikela having at least three different and apparently separate roots is a major problem. Previously, three kings between the late eighth and early ninth centuries having confirmed historicity were known to have had this Deva name-ending: Ānandadeva, Bhavadadeva and Kāntideva, of whom the previous two were evidently stationed at Devaparvata while the



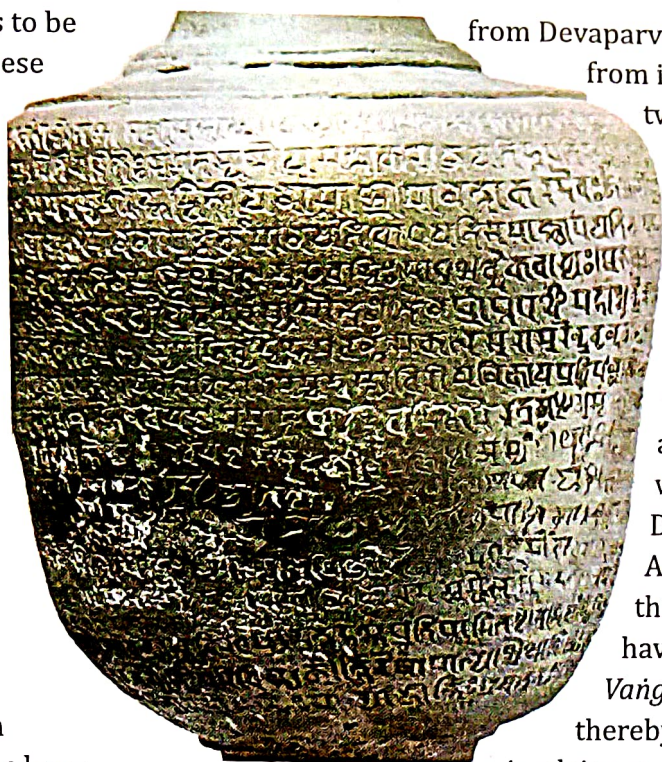
third one issued land grant charter from Varddhamānapura in Harikela identified with modern Bara-Uthan village of the Patiya Upazila [a revenue unit] in Chittagong (Bhattacharya 2000: 473 and references therein)⁸. Sircar took them to belong to the two sections of the same lineage who ruled in the broader Comilla-Noakhali-Chattagram areas (Sircar 1982a: 182). With the recent discoveries of two copper vase inscriptions of Devātideva (CE 715) and Attākaradeva (c. early tenth century) from the Chittagong area have led Gouriswar Bhattacharya to argue

Ashrafpur Copperplate of
Devakhaḍga

Image Source: Memoirs
of Asiatic Society of
Bengal, vol. 1, plate VII

that Kāntideva has to be placed between these two rulers of whom the first belonged to the well known Khasa tribe who in the early medieval period had settled in the Chittagong hill tracts having definite connections with Myanmar and Arakan, as the date seventy-seven recorded in the inscription has been

corroborated in terms of the Burmese era commencing from CE 638 (Bhattacharya op. cit.)⁹. However, the relationship between these kings is far from clear, more particularly because the Khasa identity of the first ruler of the line so proudly proclaimed is not reiterated by his successors ruling from the same geopolitical base. Suchandra Ghosh has recently shown with epigraphic and literary references that the Khasa tribe gained Kṣatriya identity by virtue of their proficient military activities, finally finding place in the Pāla military organization as indicated by their frequent mention in many Pāla inscriptions (Ghosh 2006, 2011a; cf. Bhattacharya op. cit.). Another Deva family ruling

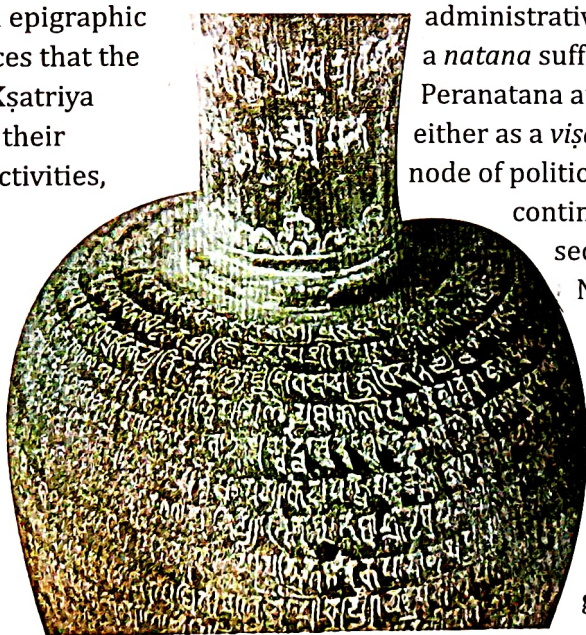


from Devaparvata is known from inscriptions of two kings named Anandadeva and his son Bhavadeva donating land in the Peranatana district; however, this family seems to have hardly had any connection with the Chittagong Deva family. Further, Anandadeva of this line is found to have used the epithet *Vaṅgālamrgāṅka*, thereby probably

implying an antecedent stage of development of Vaṅgāla as a separate geopolitical unit in southeastern Bengal (in Sylhet more precisely), finally finding an established identity in the early tenth century when during the rule of Śricandra the essentially local Vaṅgāla maṭha is being differentiated from the Deśāntariya maṭha establishments. It is quite interesting to note that several

administrative centres having a *natana* suffix like Jayanatana, Peranatana and Guptinatana either as a *viṣaya* or a major node of political administration continued in the Comilla

sector from the time of Nāthacandra to that of the Deva rulers of Comilla. Overall, the Samataṭa-Harikela areas of southeastern Bengal having their own distinctive and yet highly fluid geopolitical orbits,



Chittagong Vase
inscription of
Attākaradeva

Image Source:
Bhattacharya 2000: 643

Chittagong Vase
inscription of Devātideva

Image Source:
Bhattacharya 2000: 644

witnessed the rise and fall of a number of local dynastic polities that rendered the trans-Meghna region the identity of a major sub-regional node in the general canvas of geopolity in early medieval Bengal (Chattopadhyaya 1993-94, 2003: 87).

The third and the final line of development of the pre-Pāla phase in Bengal started with the accession of Śaśāṅka on the throne of Gauḍa and the varying lines of continuous power conflicts of this phase in which Śaśāṅka played a major role finally paving foundation to the



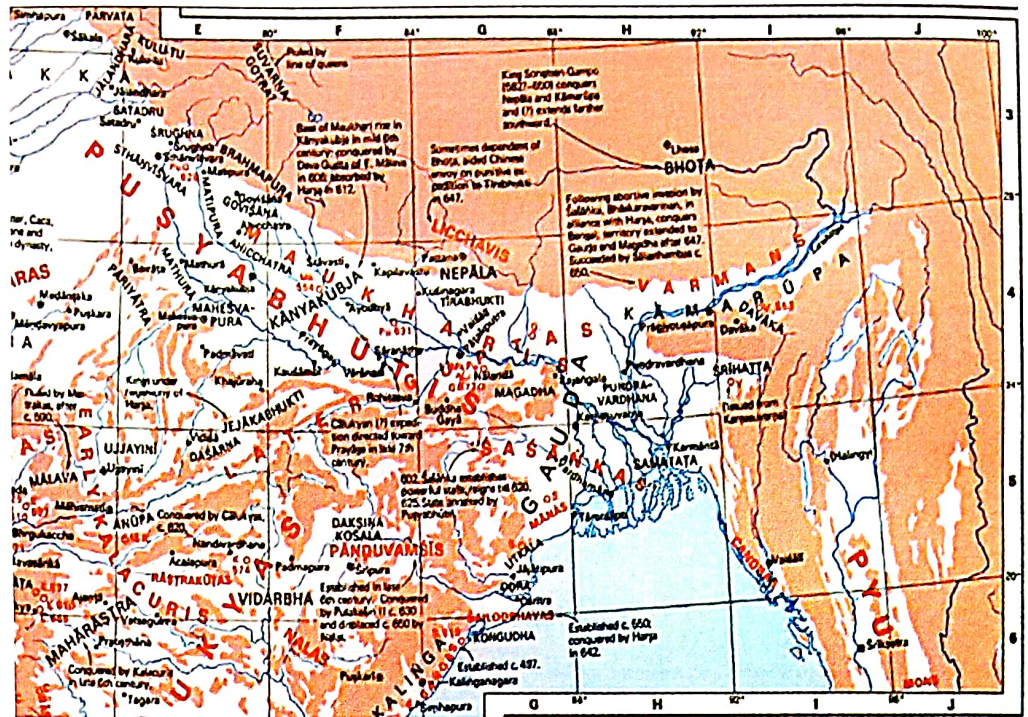
Rohtasgarh Seal of Śaśāṅka

Image Source: Cunningham 1892:

Plate XXVII

circumstances leading to the rise of the imperial Pāla lineage. Śaśāṅka's name as a *mahāsāmanta* is found engraved on a seal matrix at Rohtasgarh in Bihar (Fleet 1863: 283-84);

he is found to have had a sound administrative machinery from the level

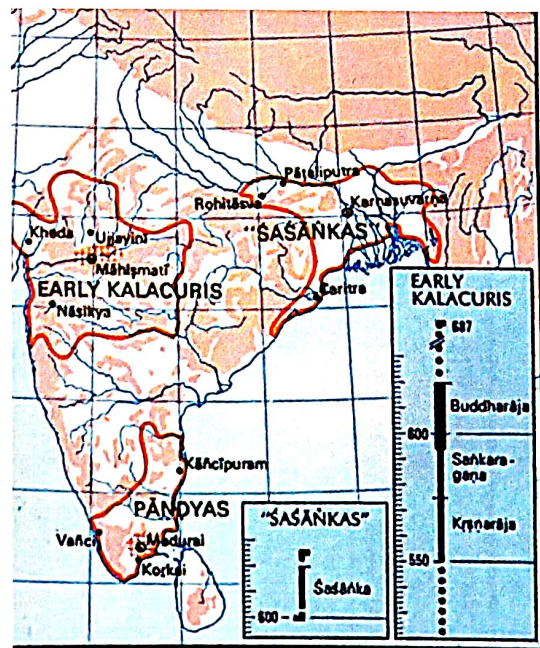


of the province to that of the village with elements of reciprocity at lower tiers in and around Daṇḍa *bhukti* attached to Utkala-deśa according to the Antla (i.e. the so-called Midnapore) copperplates; and he is finally mentioned as the overlord of the Śailodbhava Mādhavavarman II in the Ganjam area of Odisha in AD 619 (Hultzs 1981). That Śaśāṅka had his political-

Both Map Showing
Territory of Śaśāṅka

Top Map :

Image Source: Schwartzberg
1992 (<https://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/pager.html?object=063>)



Left Map :

Image Source: Ibid.
(<https://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/pager.html?object=183>)

administrative headquarters at Karṇasuvarṇa is known from Xuan-zang's travelogue (Beal 1981: 210) and that he was the paramount sovereign of Gauḍa (i.e., *Gauḍeśvara*) is known from the commentary of the text of Bāṇabhaṭṭa called *Harṣacarita* (Cowell and Thomas 1897: 275; cf. Hultzsch op.cit. 143 and Buhler 1892: 70). Considering the location of Karṇasuvarṇa on the northern bank of the Bhagirathi in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, as revealed from archaeological excavations (Das 1968), the political dominion of Śaśāṅka has to be mapped over wider areas of Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha.¹⁰ Recently Dilip K. Chakrabarti has categorically underlined the geopolitical self-consistency of his kingdom in the context of ancient Indian routes of political and cultural linkages. His observation demands a thorough notice (Chakrabarti 2010:73).

In the political context of the time when the lines of domination were changing fast, Śaśāṅka must be credited with the carving out of a kingdom which was reasonably coherent geographically. The alignment along the western bank of the Ganga/ Bhagirathi from Karṇasuvarṇa to Medinipur and from Medinipur to Orissa is clear and has been a majorline of movement in Indian history. The extension up to Rohtasgarh suggests that this kingdom also included the entire highland area from the western part of modern West Bengal to the Gaya-Sasaram sector of modern Bihar. Rohtasgarh is approachable from Sasaram, with the



Son flowing around Rohtasgarh. This area gives direct access to the Pālamau section of the Chhotanagpur plateau, and a major route from south Bihar to the Banares area via Bhabua and Chakia passes through this general area. The configuration of Śaśāṅka's kingdom involves segments of two distinct routes of ancient India.

Inside View of Rohtasgarh
Fort of Śaśāṅka

Other than Śaśāṅka, the only ruler whose name can be doubtlessly associated with this early Gauḍa sector is a Vaiṣṇava king named Jayanāga known from a sole record from Maliadanga¹¹ in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Although his administrative seat was

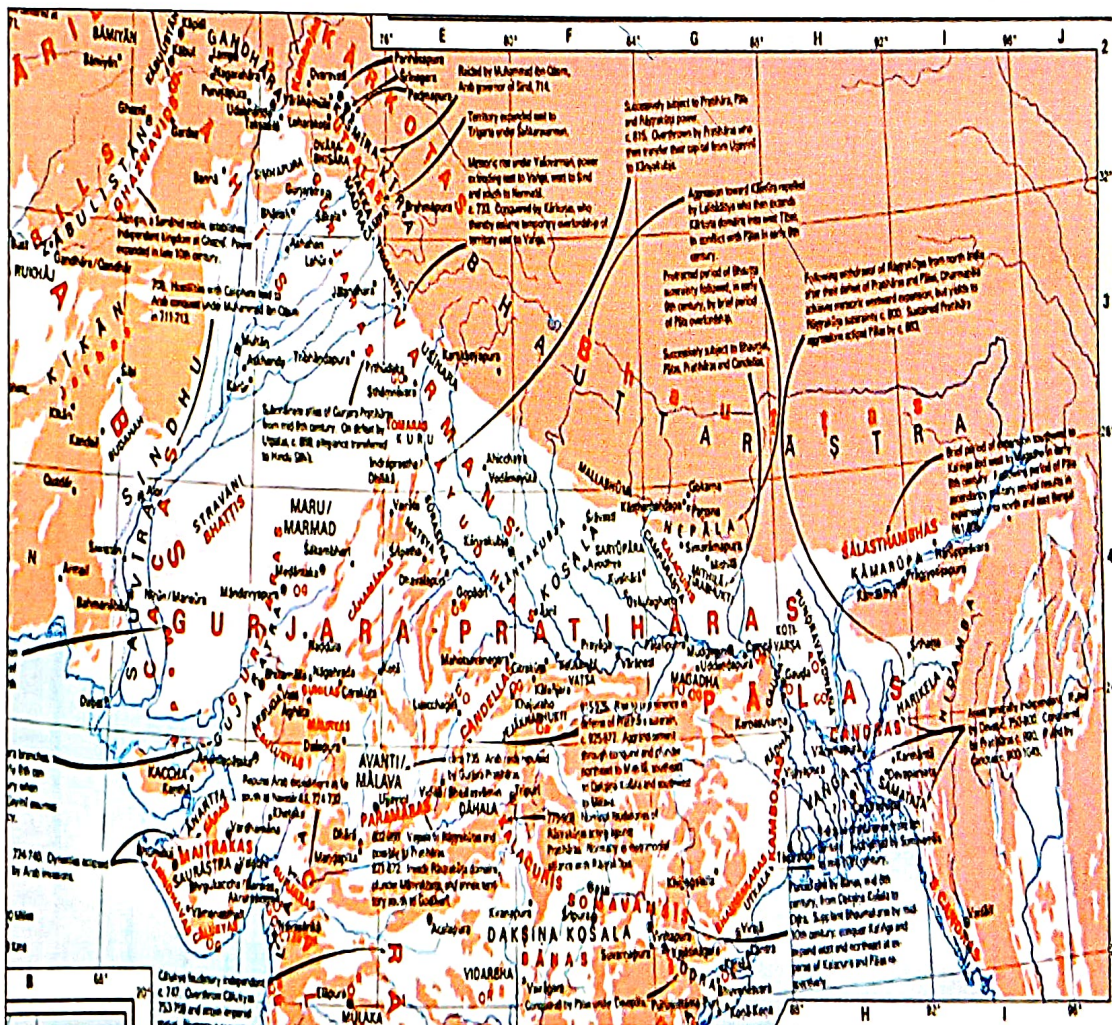
located at Kārṇasuvarṇa, in the absence of any reasonable supplementary data, it is not possible either to ascertain his chronology or status in the contemporary political scenario. However, it has been surmised by Sircar that he might have ruled Gauḍa at the wake of the *mātsyanyāya* immediately after the death of Śaśāṅka and that his *nāga* name-ending might indicate his use of the metronymic (Sircar 1985b: 112-13).

BIRTH OF THE IMPERIAL PĀLA LINEAGE: ELECTION OF GOPĀLA I AND THE ERA OF CRISIS

backdrop of the changing political complexes of eastern India discussed above and the numerous series of development within the Gangetic milieu of the north in general. After the shaking off of the Gupta yoke from the middle Ganga Valley orbit and the subsequent rise of five regional power structures, viz. the Maukhari of south Bihar (Magadha) and Kanauj (Kānyakubja), the Puṣpabhūti of Thaneswar (Sthānīśvara), the Later Gupta of Malwa, the unspecified lineage of Gauḍa and the Varman of Assam (Kāmarūpa), the earliest precisely datable record is the Haraha inscription

Map Showing Pāla territory in Bengal

Image Source: <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/pager.html?object=068>



It should be specified at the outset of this section that the rise of the Pāla supremacy has to be looked at in the

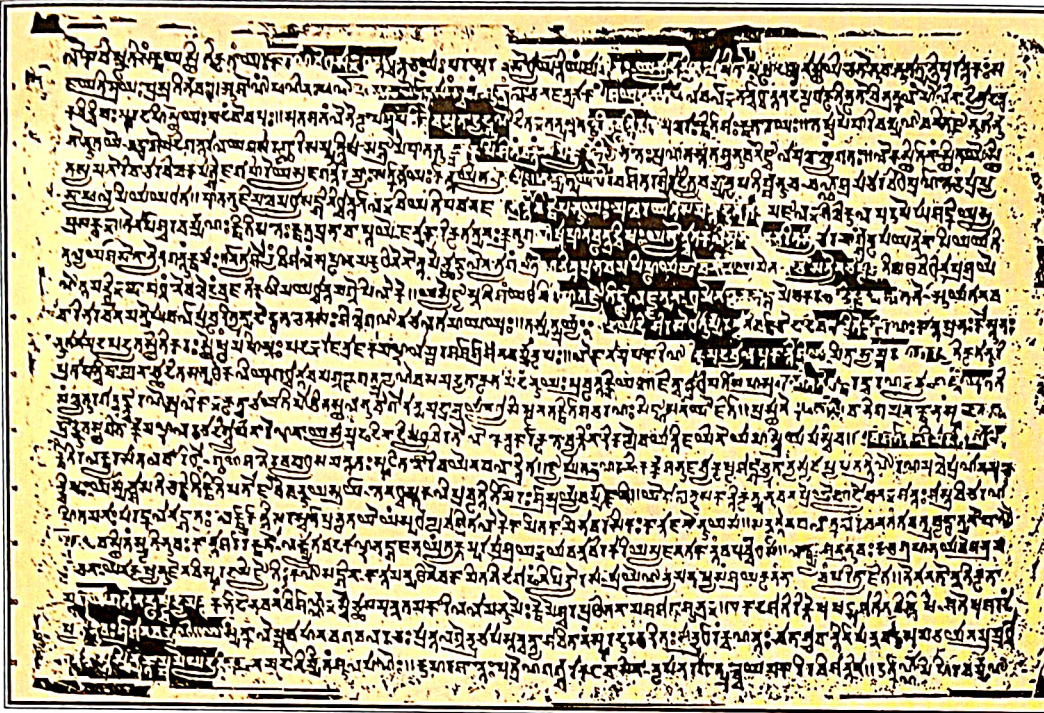
Maukhari Īśānavarman who claims to have subdued among others the king of Gauḍa (Shastri 1982, Thapliyal 1985:

23-24, 141-46). This must have happened before CE 554, the date of composition of the panegyric of Īśāna. But the issue of the circumstances leading to the rise of the Pāla king Dharmapāla, son and successor of Gopāla I, as the paramount

(the circle offriends and foes of a king) conceived by the early Indian politicians, a king's neighbouring ruler is his potential enemy while the neighbours neighbor isa potential friend. This is exemplified by the Gaudasand the Later Guptas of East

Malwa and their enmity with the Maukharis as well as the kings of Kāmarūpa.

Very recently, Dilip K. Chakrabarti in his attempt to situate early Indian dynastic polities in contemporary geographical frames has delved into understanding the contours of this struggle in the following manner (Chakrabarti 2010: 72):



Top :
Haraha Inscription of
Īśānavarman

Image Source: Śāstri
1917-18, plate no.
7html?object=068

ruler of Gauda almost unexceptionally called in contemporary literary and epigraphic texts as the *Gauḍeśvara*—has to be understood in the retrospect of the long-drawn rivalry between Gauda and Kānyakubja between the sixth and the eighth centuries. Sircar successfully explained the contours of this rivalry with reference to the ancient theory of the circle of friends and foes of a king envisaged by early political theorists like Manu. It will be interesting cite in details the enumeration of Sircar of the political alignments involved in this struggle and then consider the same series of phenomena envisaged in one of the very recent studies. Sircar writes (Sircar 1985a: 23-24):

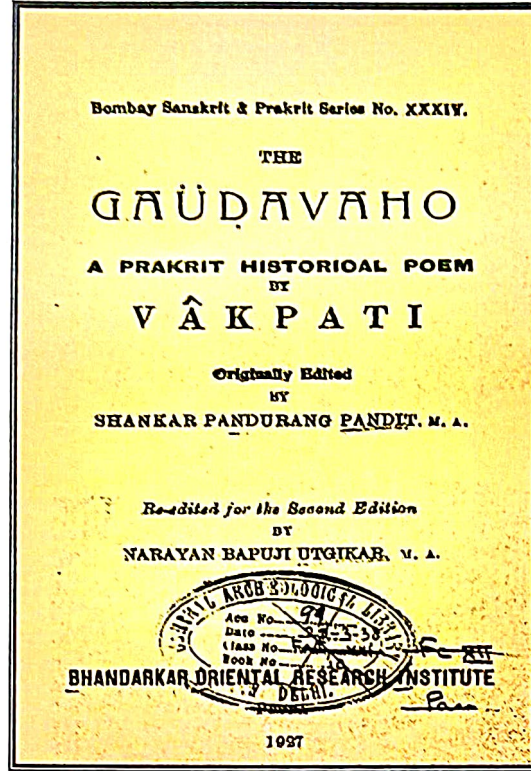
According to the mitra-amitra-cakra

In the seventh century Bengal, there was a kingdom in the old Gauda section, with its base on the northern bank of the Ganga/Bhagirathi in the Murshidabad district. Sasanka, the lone known major king of this kingdom with its capital at Karanasuvarna (Chhiruti in Murshidabad), figures in the political struggle between Ravakaravardhan, Rajyavardhan, and Harsavardhana of Thaneswar, Devagupta (presumably of the Later Gupta connection) of Malwa, and the Maukhari Grahavarman of Kanauj.

If one now juxtaposes the presentations of the same set of phenomena by the two scholars, the complicated structure of this struggle becomes fairly comprehensive. While in Sircar configuration, the Puṣyabhūti of Kanauj are absent, in

that of Chakrabarti the Kāmarūpa line does not figure. This is in fact because Sircar underlined the initial phase of the struggle in the sixth century when the Puṣyabhūti were yet to appear prominently on the scene and Chakrabarti on the other hand was looking at the most heightened sub-phase of the conflict when the Maukhari-Puṣyabhūti and Gauḍa-Later Gupta bilateral alliances and subsequent Gauḍa-Kānyakubja conflict assumed central focus where the Kāmarūpa line had nothing more to figure for. The appearance of the Puṣyabhūti replacing the early Maukhari lineage in direct confrontation with Śaśāṅka is then underlined by Chakrabarti: [t] he combined forces of Devagupta and Śaśāṅka uprooted Maukhari Grahavarman of Kanauj who was married to the Thaneswar princess Rajyasri. This brought the Thaneswar forces in...¹²

The conflict of the five regional lineages for political supremacy in northern India in theseventh century led to the rise of Ādityasena as the lord of Magadha in the late seventh century as gleaned from spatial distribution of his inscriptions along the Bhagalpur-Gaya-Patna alignment having at least one secure date of CE 672 (Thapliyal 1985: 158-166). On the seat of Kānyakubja in the early eighth century, on the other hand, one finds Yaśovarman who claims to have subdued the king of Gauḍa-Magadha according to the Prakrit text *Gauḍavaho* and seems to have had considerable political control over southern Bihar (Sircar 1982a: 44). The recent publication of the inscription of Pāhila, a minister of Devapāla, has provided concrete epigraphical corroboration to the claim made by Vākpati in the *Gauḍavaho* (Bhattacharya



Left :

Title Page of *Gauḍavaho*
published from BORI

1997,2000: 481-87).¹³ The decline of Yaśovarman in Kanauj in the middle of the eighth century paved the path for yet another lineage to flourish there under a king name Vajrāyudha, while the fall of Śaśāṅka as the paramount ruler of Gauḍa at the end of the first quarter of the seventh century is generally accepted in the extant historiography of political history of northern India as the age of inception of a long-ranging political crisis and alluded to as the *mātsyanyāya* in some of the early Pāla inscriptions and two texts of the early medieval-medieval periods. The event finally leads to the reappearance of the imperial polity of Gauḍa under one Gopāla who was elected by his subjects who showed an august example of subordinating individual interests to a national cause around the conjecturally framed date of CE 750, since the historicity and chronology of this king has to rely solely on the claims made by his successors (for early writings on

this crisis and subsequent election, refer Banerji 1987, Chanda 1975: 16, Maitreya 1987: 12-7, Majumdar 1971: 82, Ray 2000: 49, Sircar 1982a: 52-57; for an estimate of the varying versions of historians on *mātsyanyāya* and the election of the Bengali king refer Pal 2008). The issues of this anarchy and the actual significance of the story of election of Gopāla may now be looked into at some details.

The earliest epigraphic evidence on the anarchic situation of *mātsyanyāya* (*lit.* the rule of fish) where the weaker becomes an easy prey of the stronger is narrated in the fourth verse of the Indian Museum

Khalimpur plate
of Dharmapāla



copperplate of Dharmapāla dated to his twenty-sixth ruling year, falling in the

third quarter of the eighth century, issued from Mudgagiri (i.e., Munger). The famous Kesava *Praśasti* was composed at Bodh Gaya in the same year (Chakravartti 1908, Maitreya 2004: 29). The Indian Museum plate records the installation of Gopāla to put an end to anarchy by the *prakṛti* (i.e., subjects). This Gopāla is described as a *mahārājādhirāja* and descendant of the progenitor Dayitaviṣṇu. The same claim of election of Gopāla has been repeated in the Khalimpur plate of Dharmapāla dated to his thirty-second year issued from Pataliputra. The undated Nalanda *Praśasti*, however, is silent on the issue and the Implication of this silence is also important as we shall shortly see. Apart from these two and some other epigraphic documents of the early Pāla kings, two texts also present two different versions of this anarchy and subsequent election. The Buddhist *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* of the eighth century records that after the death of Soma, i.e., Śaśāṅka (Jayaswal 1934: 50-51):

The Gauḍa political system (*Gauḍatantra*) was reduced to mutual distrust, raised weapons and mutual jealousy—one (king) for a week; another for a month; then a republican constitution such will be the daily (condition) of the country on the bank of the Ganges where houses were built on the ruins of monasteries. Thereafter Soma's son Mānava will last for 8 months 5 days.

The second text is a composition of CE 1608 by the Tibetan saint Lama Tāranātha who writes that the Chandra lineage ruled in Bhaṅgāla (i.e., Vaṅgāla) from the time of Sri Harṣa (i.e., Harṣavardhana) to the rise of the Pāla dynasty. Tāranātha traces the beginning of the anarchy at the death of

the last king Lalitachandra of this lineage in the beginning of the eighth century. According to the text (Chattopadhyay 1980:251):

After him though many kṣatriyas were born in the Chandra line, none of them actually ruled the country... those who were born in the royal family lived as ministers, brahmanas, rich merchants etc. and were lords in their respective spheres. But there was no king as such ruling in the state.

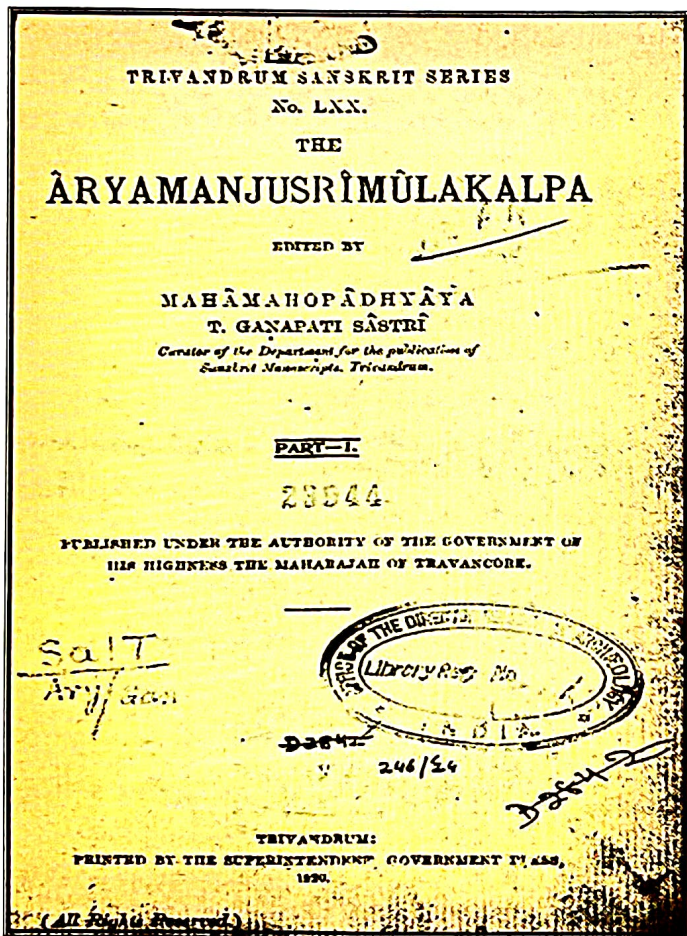
Then Tāranātha presents the story of birth of Gopāla by a tree-god on a kṣatriya woman near Puṇḍravardhana. Subsequently he is said to have come to

the country of Bhaṅgāla where the common people elected him the king of the country already suffering from long-ranging anarchy.

The inconsistencies in chronological and geographical configuration of the anarchy and election readily emerging from a review of epigraphic and literary evidences are many: Firstly, the statements on both the duration of anarchy and crisis and the location of Gopāla's election vary in *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and the travelogue of Tāranātha. Sayantani Pal rightly detects that while for the former, the duration was more than a century and the location of the rise of Gopāla was

Gauḍa, for the latter this anarchy started only in the first quarter of the eighth century and that too in the Bhaṅgāla region only (Pal 2008: 35). Secondly, Sircar's acceptance of Tāranātha's statements on Gopāla's early occupancy in southeastern Bengal (Sircar 1982a: 51; also Chakrabarti 1991:161-7) seems to contradict the statements of the Sian inscription of Nayapāla (Sircar 1972-73, 1982b: 102-22, 1985c) who claims that Gopāla I exerted a severe blow against the king ruling at Samataṭa, where only two image inscriptions from Baghaura (Bhattachali 1918, 1983a) and Narayanpur (Chakravarti 1956, Sircar 1942) in the Comilla reign of Mahīpāla I have been accepted as reliable source to advocate for Pāla rule in the Tippera region (Sircar 1952). If Gopāla hailed originally from the southeast, his attack

Title page of *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* edited by
T. Ganapati Shastri





Paharpur Buddhist Monastery established in the reign of by Dharmapāla

on Samatāṭa cannot have any explanation (Chowdhury 1967: 18, Ghosh 2011: 222). It has been recovered from the statements of *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* that Gauḍa was the most prominent part of Bengal to the author of this text and Gopāla had acquired supremacy over this region (Pal 2008: 24). Thirdly, the distribution of epigraphic records of Dharmapāla from Paharpur in the east to Nalanda in the west fairly shows his stronghold in north Bengal and south Bihar. His reference as a king of Vaṅgāla or Vaṅga in contemporary records outside Bengal was obviously because these fluid suborbits of Bengal like Vaṅgāla-Vaṅga-Gauḍa were possibly coterminous for the neighbouring polities for whom the only prominent figure in Bengal was Dharma (i.e., Dharmapāla).

Right: Gold Dinar of Dharmapāla



Finally, if one accepts Sircar's suggestion that the undated plate from Nalanda should predate the dated plates judging from the constitution of the charter, the issue of complete absence of the genealogy/eulogy section in this plate remains unexplainable, particularly when the other two charters so charily record this election resulting from the chaotic situation of anarchy. May one think that the story of *mātsyanyāya* and election became only relevant to Dharmapāla at a later stage when he had to draw on legitimacy of his paramount status from his predecessor as he was aspiring to figure in the larger power-axis of The Pāla-Sena and Others northern India? Reference to the story of political unrest and election of Gopāla and that to the capture of the seat of Mahodaya (i.e., Kānyakubja) in consecutive verses of both the Indian Museum and the Khalimpur plates at least end to indicate this possibility.

The most recent study aimed at understanding the historical geographical significance of the term rightly highlights the underlying factors responsible behind the currency of the story of *mātsyanyāya* in the contexts of historical texts and historiographical models. It was quite natural for the court poets of Dharmapāla

to legitimize his supremacy by way of glorifying the ancestry of the lineage and the story of upheaval provided the most suitable plank for the supposed election of the ancestor of their patron. For the author of *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, on the other hand, the same story provided the ideal atmosphere for the capture of power by a Buddhist line of kings and Tāranātha finally composed his account nearly nine hundred years after the incidents involving obvious geochronological discrepancies mixed with legends preserved in Buddhist traditions, although his statement about an early association of Gopāla with north Bengal seems correct. It is quite probable that Gopāla achieved the throne of Gauḍa either with the help of a section of a pre-existing bureaucracy or a small but powerful military set up that has been legitimized by the composers of Dharmapāla as *prakṛti* (Pal 2008). It is difficult to believe that in a state absolute lawlessness and acute chaotic political environment the common populace will unanimously elect a person to gift him with the royal seat of Gauḍa. Sircar has shown more than one example of election of a king in ancient Indian tradition, but they probably form part of the larger process of legitimization of polity in early medieval India (Sircar 1982a: 56-57).

PĀLA GENEALOGY BETWEEN DHARMAPĀLA AND MADANAPĀLA: NEW SOURCES

A proper reconstruction of the genealogy and chronology of the Pāla kings is primarily constrained by two factors: firstly, the Pāla kings recorded dates in terms of their ruling years instead of that of any particular system

of known reckoning like the Vikrama or the Śaka eras, leaving a few crucially valuable exceptions though; secondly, the sources clearly show that in this family many of the kings used the names of predecessors, resulting into the appearance of several persons with one single name. The problem is further aggravated by references to Pāla kings in the inscriptional records of other lineages like the GP whose records are precisely dated in terms of calendrical years and therefore the Pāla dates are ought to be corroborated by the date ranges of kings of this and other contemporary families.

Tāranātha assigns Gopāla I a reign of forty-five years, whereas *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* suggests that he ruled for twenty-seven years and passed away at the age of 80. Sircar discarded the mythical elements in these estimates and fixed the chronology of Gopāla between CE 750 and 775 based on the conventional notion of one generation of twenty-five years (Sircar 1982a: 51). The Actual political history starts with the rise of Dharmapāla as the paramount sovereign of Bengal in CE 775 according to Sircar. It is recovered from the epigraphic sources of Dharmapāla that after the death of Gopāla I, Dharmapāla ascended the throne and two rulers following him, viz. Devapāla, Śūrapāla I, the son and grandson of Dharmapāla respectively, ruled in Bihar-Bengalin the ninth century. After this, the line of Dharmapāla closes and that of his younger brother Vākpāla begins. There is so far no definite proof of rule of Vākpāla and his followers till Vighrapāla I¹⁴, but epigraphic and literary evidences dated in the ruling years of his successors starting from Nārāyaṇapāla to Madanapāla testify

Right:
Rangpur Copperplate of
Mahipala I

Image Source: Suchan-
dra Ghosh (ed), Journal
of Ancient Indian
History, volume XX-
VII(2010-11), p.245(iii)

Below:
Paharpur
mahavihar stone pillar
inscription of the 5th
regnal year of pāla king
Mahendrapāla

Image source: Haque
2014, p. 260

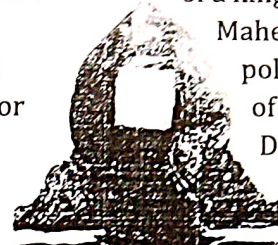
to the rule of kings of the line of Vākpāla from the late ninth to the mid twelfth centuries. Based on these collateral lines of succession, a considerable number of considerations and reconsiderations of the Pāla genealogy and chronology have been attempted by a number of historians and epigraphists, of which a systematic summary till 1984 is available in Susan L. Huntington (Huntington 1984: 29-38). The latest of the estimates available till the time of Huntington was that of Sircar envisaged in the 1975-76 (Sircar 1975-76), where he gave a detailed genealogy of all the members of the Pāla family (including the kings who apparently did not rule and mentioned only in epigraphic and literary sources of ruling members of the family) and a through chronology of all the members of the lineage based on the then known latest dates from inscriptions and manuscripts.¹⁵ Huntington offered her own proposal based on the compilation from all the then available sources (Huntington op. cit. 38), although she cautiously refrained from calculating the chronology for problems that will be discussed below.¹⁶

The complex issue of Pāla genealogy and chronology and many related issues

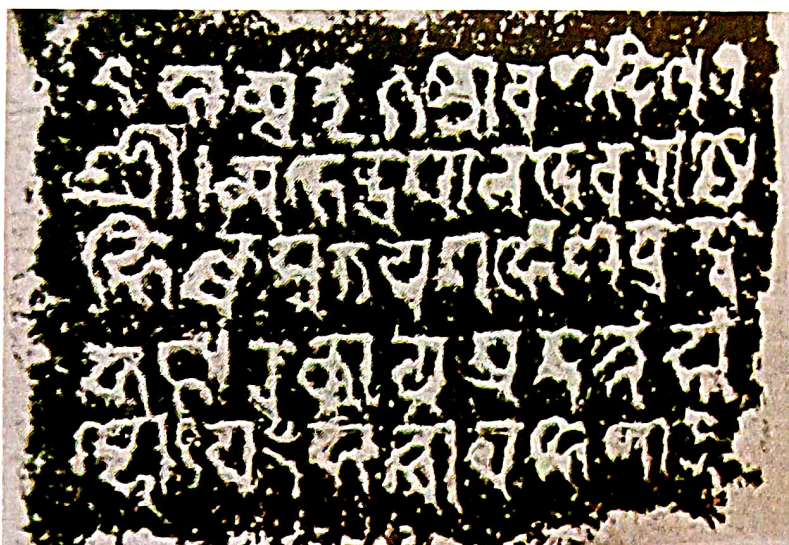
in northern Indian polity assumed an altogether new shape almost immediately following Huntington's publication in March 1987 when a copperplate inscription

son and
successor
king

of a king named
Mahendrapāla,
political
of the Pāla
Devapāla, son



of Dharmapāla was discovered from the mound of Tulabhita or Salaidanga in the Habibpur Police Station of Malda district. Soon the record proved to be of paramount significance in the history of northern and eastern Indian polity because of the reason that as many as twelve dedicatory inscriptions on images, stupas and architectural members of a king named Mahendrapāla were already known from Bengal-Bihar (Sanyal 2009a and references therein); this Mahendrapāla was considered by R.D. Banerji to have been identical with the GP ruler of the same name. Thus, Banerji came to the conclusion that GP Mahendrapāla had extended his political dominance in eastern India, subduing the contemporary



Pāla monarch in the first half of the ninth century (Banerji, 1918). The discovery of the Tulabhita plate completely disproved the above theory and made a number of fresh issues to emerge in the Pāla political history as well as the history of the Pāla-GP relations. Notwithstanding the significance of the discovery of the Tulabhita plate, one has to put on record that the report of this copperplate was but the initiation of a plethora of discoveries (or rediscoveries) of epigraphs and manuscripts that necessitated a thorough revision of the history of northern-eastern Indian polity of the Pāla dynasty and their near contemporaries. Thus, the discovery of the Tulabhita plate was succeeded by the discovery of two plates of Madanapāla of the same dynasty in 1990 from the mound called Sibbati in the Rajibpur village in South Dinajpur district, the publication of two hitherto unknown plates of the time of one Gopāla, son and successor of Śūrapāla I preserved in a private collection at Los Angeles, a third plate of the reign of the same king from Mohipur in the Bogra district of Bangladesh, the Biyala and the Rangpur plates of the time of Mahīpāla I from Jaypurhat and Rangpur districts respectively in Bangladesh. A unique stone inscription of the thirty-third ruling year of Mahīpāla I from Rajbhita in the Dinajpur district of Bangladesh also deserves notice (Haque and Kuddus 2005a, Roy 2009, for the reading of Gouriswar Bhattacharya).¹⁷

The discovery of the new copper plate inscriptions of the Pāla family demanded, inter alia, a further reconsideration of the genealogy and chronology of the lineage particularly of the first group of kings of the line of Dharmapāla. The *prima facie* showed the immediacy of three



FIG. 1

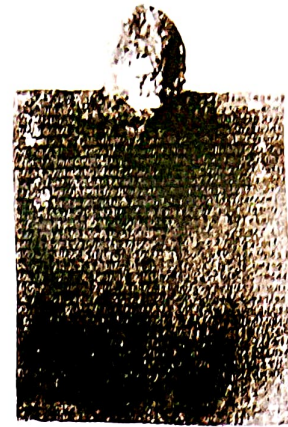


FIG. 2



necessary amendments: 1. A king named Mahendrapāla, the GP namesake of the Pāla lineage, ruled between Devapāla and Śūrapāla I. 2. Another new king named Gopāla, son and successor of Śūrapāla I, ruled for at least four years; hence, this Gopāla had to be numbered Gopāla II as previously the son of Rājyapāla was considered Gopāla II and the grandson of Rāmapāla Gopāla III (who are to be now called Gopāla III and IV respectively) and 3. The discovery of the second Rajibpur plate proved that Madanapāla ruled for at least twenty-two years and not eighteen as previously believed unanimously. Gouriswar Bhattacharya gave a tabular schem of the genealogy summarizing the entire database available till then (Bhattacharya 1998). S.C. Mukherjee attempted a reconstruction primarily based on his wrong reading of the digit 32 for 22 in the second Rajibpur plate along with the dates available in the records of other kings and suggested a date

Above:

Biyala copperplate inscription of Mahīpāla I

Image Source: Suchandra Ghosh (ed), Journal of Ancient Indian History, volume XX-VII(2010-11), p.245(iii)

range of 1143-1175/6; the reasons of assigning fifty-seven years by Mukherjee to Nārāyaṇapāla remains equally questionable (Mukherjee 1999). S.C. Bhattacharyas recent reconstruction on the basis of MKYR (i.e. maximum known year of reign) available in the records of the kings of the Dharmapāla line shows how the first six rulers of the dynasty, because of the incorporation of Mahendrapāla and Gopāla II, have to be accommodated in the pedigree within a span of about 123 years (Bhattacharya 2007).¹⁸

A review of the above schemes offered by epigraphists from D.C. Sircar to S.C. Bhattacharya would show one striking similarity in methodology: the inception of the lineage under Gopāla I in CE 750, a datum line fixed by R.C. Majumdar and

D.C. Sircar. It is curious to note that some of the other scholars, as Huntington's composite table would show, located this inception at dates which are closer to CE 750 but not exactly that date. But a detailed analysis of this specific difference will lead one to undertake issues that demand a separate focus of inquiry. A fresh attempt was made during the present work to re-address the issue of Pāla genealogy in the light of all the available sources of which the most crucial sets of evidence surfaced in the last three decades, obviously because of a renewed interest of scholars in Pāla history inspired by the discovery of the Tulabhita copperplate. A review of the available literature on Pāla literary and epigraphic evidences juxtaposed against the so far known estimates of the Pāla genealogy showed that in spite of all the coherent attempts, a few crucial evidences have so far escaped the notice of scholars dealing in the problem. Considering the entire range of database in hand from the time of Dharmapāla to Madanapāla, the following are the chronologically arranged evidences that would lead one to a yet another reconsideration of the issue:

1. The discovery of the Tulabhita plate suggests that there was a king named Mahendrapāla who ruled for fifteen years between Devapāla and Śūrapāla I, the latter being the younger brother of Mahendrapāla as the Tulabhita plate suggests.

2. A king named Gopāla succeeded Śūrapāla I and ruled for at least four years, as evident from the two Los Angeles plates; this has to result, as already stated, in renaming Gopāla II and Gopāla III as Gopāla III and IV, son of Rājyapāla and Kumārapāla respectively.

Right :

Tulabhita or Jagjivanpur Copperplate of Mahendrapāla

Image Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Copper_plate_inscription_of_Mahendra_Pala_State_Archaeological_Museum_in_West_Bengal-1%2C_Satyen_Roy-Rd%2C_Auddy_Bagan_Basti%2C_Behala%2C_Kolkata%2C_West_Bengal_700034_First_Floor-Nandadighi_Vihara%2C_Jagjivanpur_Gallery.jpg

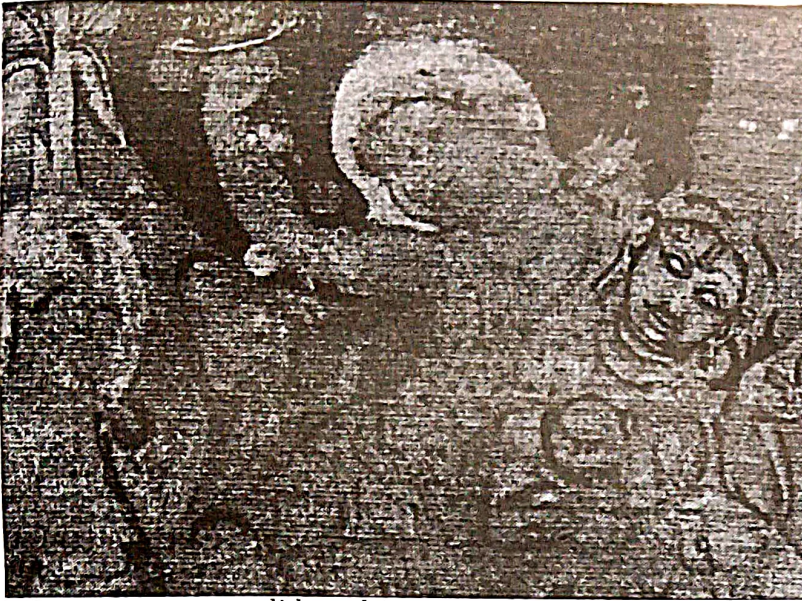


3. If the convention is to number kings of same name in terms of their chronological appearance, the reason behind not naming Śūrapāla, son of Devapāla, as Śūrapāla I, is not understandable, for there was a second Śūrapāla, son of Vighrahapāla III who should be named Śūrapāla II. Likewise, the reasons behind not naming Rājyapāla, the second ruler of the line of Vākpāla and the successor of Nārāyaṇapāla, as Rājyapāla II remains inexplicable, since there was a previous Rājyapāla (who should be named Rājyapāla I), the son of Devapāla, who apparently did not rule as the available evidences suggest.

4. Sircar and all the scholars following him believed that out of the three Vighrahapāla, only Vighrahapāla III, successor of Nayapāla, ascended the throne and ruled for twenty-six years. Huntington argued on the basis of her own stylistic analysis that an image of seated Buddha in the Indian Museum assigned unanimously to the twelfth or thirteenth year of Vighrahapāla III of the mid eleventh century should in fact be placed in the reign of Vighrahapāla I of ninth century, successor of Jayapāla and nephew of Dharmapāla (Huntington 1984: 47). However, there is more than one reason to argue that this image was carved during the reign of the intermediate Vighrahapāla II, grandson of the renamed Rājyapāla II in the tenth century. Although a detailed study of the image and the inscription is beyond the purview of this essay, a few points will be demanding to justify the argument. In the area of style, the nascent stage of development of the conical back-slab which is round in the ninth century and sharply conical in the eleventh, the crudely carved *pancharatha* pedestal

with a beveled outer border showing an intermediate stage between the *triratha* pedestal of the ninth century and the sharp *pancharatha* of the eleventh and the high relief and thickset accommodation of the subsidiary figures on the back-slab markedly characterized by the absence of a *kirttimukha*, which becomes an essential component of the eleventh century idiom—all these stylistic features would put this image to the tenth century. In the realm of palaeographic features, even the lesser number of letters in the single lined inscription would explain that the style of writing shows a transitional phase of development from mature Siddhamātrkā to Gauḍī that initiated from the middle or second half of the tenth century. Since the only Vighrahapāla who can be dated to the tenth century is Vighrahapāla II, it is tempting to assign this image to his reign. The hypothesis gains a stronger plank with the recent publication of an image of the reign of one Vighrahapāla where the inscription clearly suggests that the donor's father-in-law was a minister of Rājyapāla (i.e., our Rājyapāla II). Although this image does not provide the exact year of reign of Vighrahapāla, it is clear from style and palaeography that it belonged to tenth century and hence to the reign of Vighrahapāla II; thus, this image clearly proves that Vighrahapāla II ascended the Pāla throne after Gopāla III (Bhattacharya 2000: 281-91). If the present argument on the date of the Indian Museum Buddha is accepted, one has to again provide twelve years for this king demanding a second set of amendments in the line of Vākpāla.¹⁹

5. It was unanimously believed that Vighrahapāla III was succeeded on the Pāla throne by his son Rāmapāla whose elder brothers Mahīpāla II and Śūrapāla II



did not have any chance to the throne



Images on a manuscript dated in the sixth year of a Mahīpāla II

Image Source: Saraswati 1978: 35, 38

and therefore in all the genealogies of previous scholars they do not figure as ruling kings. But S.K. Saraswati argued that a manuscript dated in the sixth year of a Mahīpāla should be dated to the reign of Mahīpāla II of the eleventh century on the basis of stylistic analysis of the illustrations (Saraswati 1978: 35, 38). However, his arguments were summarily dismissed by Sircar to whom this was an absurd proposition considering Mahīpāla I ruling in 1026 and the accession of Madanapāla in 1143, as he thought it would be impossible to accommodate

this second Mahīpāla with six years of rule within this short span of time (Sircar 1982b: 87). But the claim of Saraswati has recently been categorically reiterated by Claudine Bautze-Picron in the light of stylization of the illustrations (Bautze-Picron 1999). The proposition of Saraswati and Bautze-Picron can be readily supported by an examination of writing style of the text also, bearing close resemblance to those found in the manuscripts of Rāmapāla than those of Mahīpāla I. One has to further remember that the rediscovery of Mahendrapāla created a similar situation where one is compelled to accommodate three rulers within the time bracket between c. CE 833 and 860. Rāmapāla's second brother Śūrapāla II was also not known to have had any records dated in his own reign, allowing Sircar to surmise that he met an early death after a fratricidal conflict leading to the coronation of Rāmapāla. But a recent publication of a manuscript by Eva Allinger dated in the second year of one Śūrapāla has proved beyond all doubts that this Śūrapāla cannot be a ruler of ninth century as the stylistic features of the figurative representations as well as the palaeography of the manuscript clearly reveal that it has to be dated at a later date and hence should be assigned to Śūrapāla II (Allinger 2006). Considering the authority of these scholars in the areas of eastern Indian iconography and art of the early medieval period, one has to accommodate, once more, now in the second line of the imperial Pāla kings, the accession of three monarchs, viz. Mahīpāla II, Śūrapāla II and Rāmapāla within the span from c. CE 1067 to 1075.

6. Finally, the date twenty-two available in the second Rajibpur plate of

Madanapāla will necessitate an extension of the reign of this king by four years as he was previously known to have ruled for eighteen years.

7. In the area of dates of inscriptions, some crucially significant exceptions to the general practice of recording dates in terms of regnal years of concerned kings are found in some of the epigraphic records of the family. In altogether three inscriptions the dates are given in Śaka and the Vikrama eras. Quite interestingly, all these dates come from donative records, presumably because of donor's acquaintance with the then prevalent systems of reckoning in other parts of the country. Thus, an inscription of Mahīpāla I from Sarnath is dated in Vikrama Samvat 1083 equivalent to CE 1026 showing that Mahīpāla I was ruling in that particular year (Cunningham 1968: 182, Hultzsch 1885, Maitreya 2004: 104-9). A second pedestal inscription from Nongarh in Bihar dated in Vikrama Samvat 1201 (= CE 1144) similarly fell in the early part of Madanapāla's reign (Sircar 1967a). A third date of similar kind comes again from the reign of Madanapāla who is found to rule in Śaka era 1083, i.e., CE 1160/1 in his eighteenth year (Sircar 1951a, 1954a, 1958a). The fourth date has been recovered from a dedicatory record of the time of one Govindapāla who is usually supposed to have succeeded Madanapāla following the imperial Pāla line in at least south Bihar (Banerji 1915: 109, Sircar 1965b); the problems of considering the issue can be discussed later.

Thus, a reconsideration of the most current set of sources would lead one to amend a number of issues in the Pāla genealogy: a.

Apart from the inclusion of Mahendrapāla and Gopāla II in the first line of kings, Mahīpāla II and Śūrapāla II have also to be included in the list of kings immediately preceding Rāmapāla. b. following the convention numbering homonymous rulers in terms of appearance, the well known Rājyapāla, the son and successor of Nārāyaṇapāla, has now to be called Rājyapāla II for reasons explained above and c. Vīrahapāla II has to be given the status of a ruling king for no less than 12 years in the light of the fresh dating of the Rohoi (Bihar) Buddha in the Indian Museum, though one should keep this issue open to further critic.

It is found in all the relatively justifiable attempts at structuring chronology that the scholars have initiated with the preconceived conjecture that Gopāla I started his reign in CE 750, and then they tried to match the lines of accession and to finally corroborate the absolute dates available in the inscriptions of Mahīpāla I and Madanapāla. However, an easier option available after the discovery of the Balgudar inscription showing an absolute date was to go back from Madanapāla, who must have initiated rule in 1143, tracking down to the reign of Dharmapāla with a calculation of the maximum years of reign of each king available from a thorough sampling of their written records. Although the intricate calculations involved in this

Below:
Balgudar
Inscription

Image Source: Epigraphia Indica, Vol XXVII, between pp. 144-145



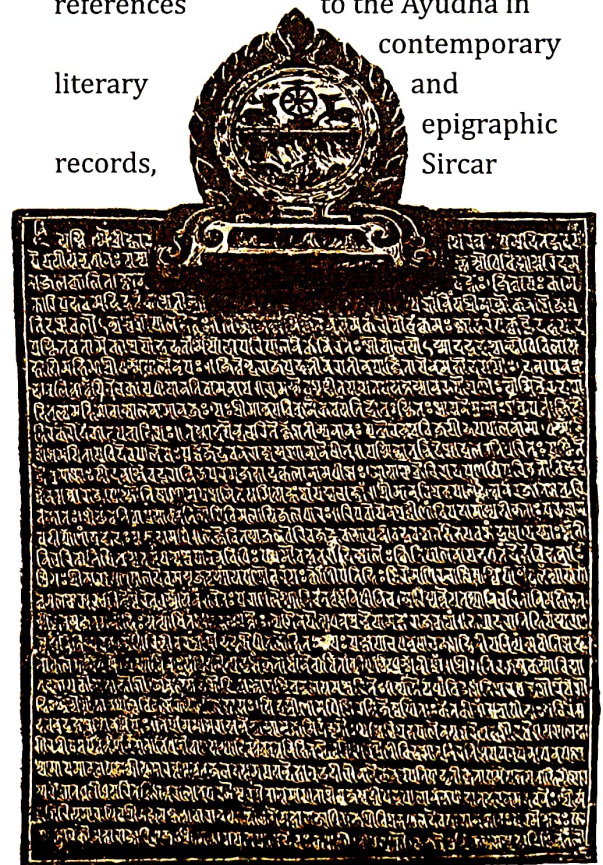
exercise is beyond the scope of this discourse, considering the acceptance of the new rulers like Vighrahapāla II and others as well as the latest known dates preserved in epigraphs and manuscripts, the accession and decline of Dharmapāla's rule can be reasonably put around CE 766 and 798 respectively. This readily takes back the date of coronation of Gopāla to CE 741. Note that the date of end of Dharmapāla's rule envisaged here is in sharp contrast to all the earlier estimates where this king is found on the Pāla throne till the early ninth century. One has to mention with equal emphasis that because of the impediments caused by the nature of presentation of dates in most of the Pāla inscriptions, a single new date in the reign period of any of the kings might entirely invalidate the present state of research and this is inevitable.

FROM DHARMAPĀLA TO MAHENDRAPĀLA: 'KĀNYAKUBJA-GAUḌA' CONFLICT

A review of the major epigraphic database pertaining to the reign of Dharmapāla clearly shows that the study of political history of the Pāla lineage under his control is more or less coextensive with that of the struggle involving the Pāla of Bengal, the GP of Rajasthan-Uttar Pradesh and the RK of Deccan centring round the capture of the seat of Kānyakubja in the late eighth-early ninth century an issue that almost equivocally characterized the historiography on the theme till the later part of the twentieth century. The issue of this conflict of three was first underlined by H.C. Raychaudhuri who coined the term 'Tripartite Struggle', justifying his nomenclature by saying (Sen and Raychaudhuri 1934: 80):

The tradition of empire attached to Kanauj from the time of Harṣa to the Muslim conquest. Rulers of the most distant corners of India counted it their proudest boast to have captured Mahodaya-Śrī, i.e., the royal splendor of Kanauj. Bitter contests ensued for the possession of the imperial city. Soon the theory gained currency in the broader canvas of history of polity in early medieval northern India (Altekar 1934, Majumdar 1971, 2005, Mishra 1966, Puri 1957, Ray 1936, Sen 1942). A new dimension to this struggle was first visualized by D.C. Sircar has emphasized the role of a still inadequately known lineage called Ayudha having its root in Pañcāla, who captured Kanauj in the first half of the eighth century under one Vajrāyudha, succeeded by Indrāyudha alias Indraraja. On the basis of certain references to the Āyudha in

contemporary literary and epigraphic records, Sircar



Right:
Bhagalpur Copper Plate,
Obverse.

Image source: Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol-47, part-I (1878) plate no. XXIV.

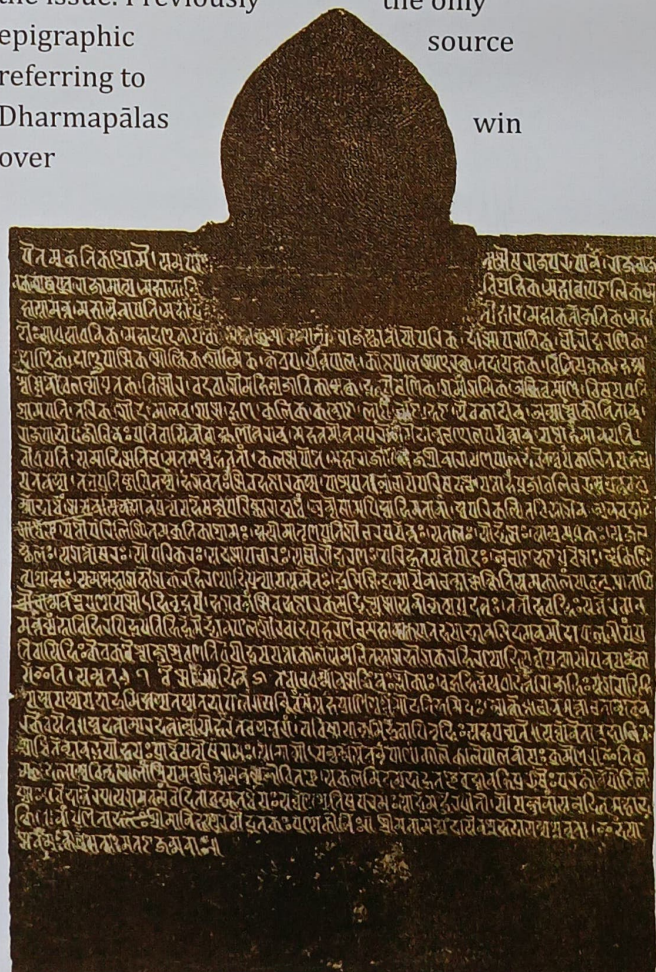
concluded that immediately after rising to power as the lord of Gauḍa, Dharmapāla resumed the old rivalry with Kānyakubja and attacked Indrāyudha to enthrone his regent Cakrāyudha. Sircar rightly detects that this marks a renewed phase of the old conflict that centred round the Pāla and the Āyudha families alternately supported by the GP and RK under fast-changing axis of power. Sircar's configuration of this conflict was based on the statements made in the Khalimpur plate of Dharmapāla, the Bhagalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla and some of the later records of the GP and the RK and their feudatories. But the time-frame he structured in relation to this struggle requires a revisit. Sircar believed following the claim made in the Khalimpur plate that initially Dharmapāla was successful in subduing Indrāyudha to install Cakrāyudha at Kanauj. But this success was short-lived as Dharmapāla was defeated by GP Vatsarāja (having his power base near Jodhpur in Rajasthan) when Indrāyudha sought his help to regain Kanauj. But Dharmapāla again attacked Kanauj (for reasons not supplied by Sircar). But now Indrāyudha took refuge to RK Dhruva who had in the meantime subdued GP Vatsarāja; the result was a tie between Indrāyudha and Dhruva, the latter defeating Dharmapāla near Kanauj. But soon after his return to Deccan, the Gauḍa king again attacked Kanauj and usurped Indrāyudha to install Cakrāyudha. But then Dhruva's son Govinda III, who had already defeated Vatsarāja's son Nāgabhaṭa II, came forward to help his fathers ally Indrāyudha in the beginning of the ninth century and forced Cakrāyudha and Dharmapāla to bow down before him. Then after his return to Deccan,

Nāgabhaṭa again gained stronger political footage in northern India to the effect that his vassal Bahukadhavala defeated Dharmapāla (Sircar 1982a: 60-1). Two things appear curious in the above scheme of reconstruction. Firstly, it is seen that a single Pāla generation represented by Dharmapāla is taken to be contemporaneous to two generations of all the other polities, viz. Dhruva and Govinda III representing the RK, Vatsarāja and Nāgabhaṭa II for the GP and Indrāyudha and Cakrāyudha for the Āyudha. The second issue that seems even more curious is that Dharmapāla is found to have installed Cakrāyudha twice, if Sircar's interpretation is accepted, on the seat of Kanauj. Let us now have a retrospect afresh at all the inscriptional sources currently available for reviewing the issue. Previously the only epigraphic source referring to Dharmapālas win over

Below:

Bhagalpur Copper Plate,
Reverse.

Image source: Journal of
Asiatic Society of Bengal,
vol-47, part-I(1878) plate
no. XXV.



Indrāyudha was the Khalimpur plate of his thirty-second year. But now it is known from the date furnished by the Indian Museum plate that the installation of Cakrāyudha by the Pāla king took place at least before his twenty-sixth year of rule. The Pāla sources that explicitly record this incident are:

1. The Indian Museum plate of year twenty-six of Dharmapāla (falling in c. AD 792 considering his accession in AD 766).

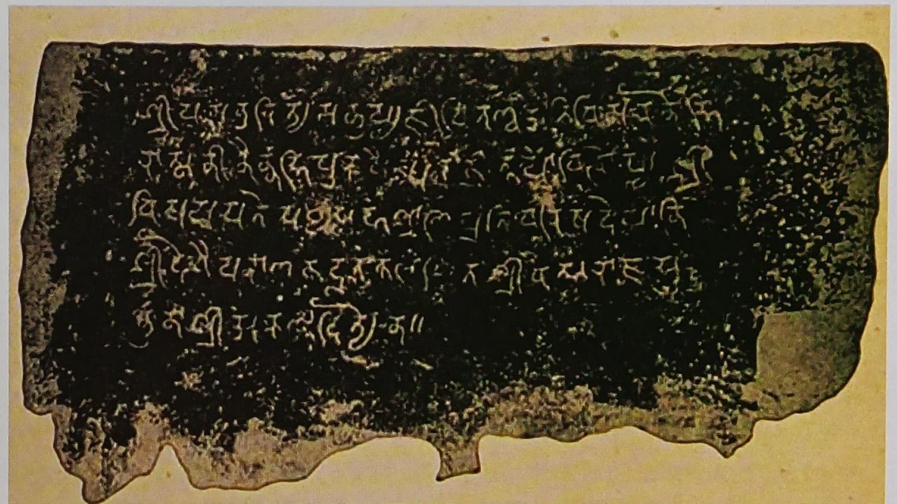
2. The Khalimpur plate of year thirty-two of the same king.

3. The Tulabhita grant of the fifteenth year of Mahendrapāla, the elder son of Dharmapāla's successor Devapāla, where an identical claim is repeated.

4. The Mohipur plate of Gopāla II, son of Śūrapāla I, where the composer clearly records the gift of villages including Kusasthala (i.e., Kānyakubja) by Dharmapāla to his friend who was an descendant or grandson (*naptr*) of Yaśovarman, the king of Kānyakubja. In all likelihood this anonymously refers to Cakrāyudha of other inscriptions. I am fully in agreement with Ryosuke Furui that if this refers to Cakrāyudha, he was probably Yaśovarman's daughter's son (Furui 2008: 67-70).

5. The Bhagalpur plate of year seventeen of Nārāyaṇapāla (around c. CE 880/1).

The records of the GP and the RK families or their feudatories precisely referring to the different junctures of this conflict, on the other hand, are all records of later rulers cherishing the memory of their ancestors' political achievements, leaving the sole exception of the Nesarika grant of Govinda III who claims to have defeated the Vaṅgāla king Dharma before at least c. CE 805, the date of issuance of the Nesarika grant. The exact claims made in the records of these families regarding their achievements against the Pāla are summarized chronologically in the following (for general outline of dates



Right:
Nesarika Grant of Gov-
inda III

Image Source: Epigraph-
ia Indica, Vol. XXXVI,
between pp. 134-135

of RK sources, refer Reu 1933 and Altekar 1934 and for those of GP, Puri 1957 and Mishra 1966).

- Nesarika plate (c. CE 805) of RK Govinda III (c. CE 794-814) claims that he defeated Dharma, the Vaṅgāla king and snatched the royal banner depicting Bhagavatī Tārā (Gupta 1963, Sircar 1963e).

- Rāḍhanpur plate (c. CE 808) of RK Govinda III claims that his father Dhruva (c. CE 785-794) captured from

GP Vatsarāja the two white umbrellas of Gauḍa (*gauḍīyam sarad-indu-pada-dhavalam chatradvayam*) captured earlier by Vatsarāja from the king of Gauḍa (Keilhorn 1981a).

- Wani plate (c. CE 808) of RK Govinda III repeats the same claim (Fleet 1882: 156-63).

- Baroda plate (c. CE 812) of RK Karkarāja informs that his uncle Govinda III put his younger brother Indraraja (i.e., the father of Karka) in charge of southern Gujarat (Lāṭa) so that the *gaudendra-Vaṅgapatinirjjaya-durvidagdha* Gurjara king can be prevented from entering Malwa (Fleet 1883).

- Barah plate (c. CE 836) of GP Bhoja (c. CE 836-85) proclaims victory of his grandfather Nāgabhaṭa II (c. CE 795-833) who drove out Cakrāyudha from Kānyakubja and granted land within Kalanjara maṇḍala of the Kānyakubja *bhukti* (Shastri 1983a, Sircar 1983: 233-35).

- Jodhpur plate (c. AD 837) of the GP feudatory Bauka claims that the army of Nāgabhaṭa II under Bauka's father Kakka achieved fame in the struggle against the Gauḍa king at Mudgagiri (Majumdar 1983a, Sircar 1983: 236-41).

- Sanjan plate (c. AD 871) of RK Amoghavarṣa (c. AD 814ñ78) claims that i. his grandfather Dhruva had defeated the king of Gauḍa in the land between Ganga and Yamuna ii. Dharma and Cakrāyudha paid tributes to his father Govinda III (c. CE 794-814) when he reached Kānyakubja and iii. His father Govinda III 'carried away' in battles the fair and unmistakable fame

of Nāgabhaṭa II. (Bhandarkar 1983b, Sircar 1983: 478-94).

- Gwalior *Praśasti* of GP Bhoja records i. the victory of his grandfather Nāgabhaṭa II (c. CE 795-833) over Cakrāyudha who was of a low demeanour and dependent on others (*pārāśarya-kṛta-sphuṭa-nīcabhāvam*) as well as the Vaṅgapati and ii. the victorious campaign of Bhoja against Dharmapāla's son (Majumdar 1983b, Sircar 1983: 242-46).

- Una plate (c. CE 899) of the GP feudatory Avanīvarman suggests that his great grandfather Bahukadhavala defeated Dharma in war (Keilhorn 1981b).

- The Chatsu plate of early Kalacuri Bālāditya (c. CE 900-20), possibly a subordinate of GP Nāgabhaṭa II, records that his matrimonial ally Guhila Śaṅkaragaṇa conquered 'Bhaṭa', the king of Gauḍa, and made a gift of this kingdom to his overlord (Bhandarkar 1982, Sircar 1983: 363-71).

- The inscriptions of RK Kṛṣṇa II (c. CE 880-915) record that he forced the Gauḍa (king) to learn modesty and also subdued the Aṅga, Kaliṅga, Vaṅga and Magadha (Reu 1933: 75, cf. Sircar 1982a: 75).

What is understandable *prima facie* from the above is, as already noted, the absence of dates of incidents in GP and RK records immediately after the time period concerned. Further, there is hardly any scope to situate Cakrāyudha at Kanauj twice under the repeated attacks of Dharmapāla who himself had to accept defeat at least from Dhruva, Govinda III and Vatsarāja. If one accepts the date of

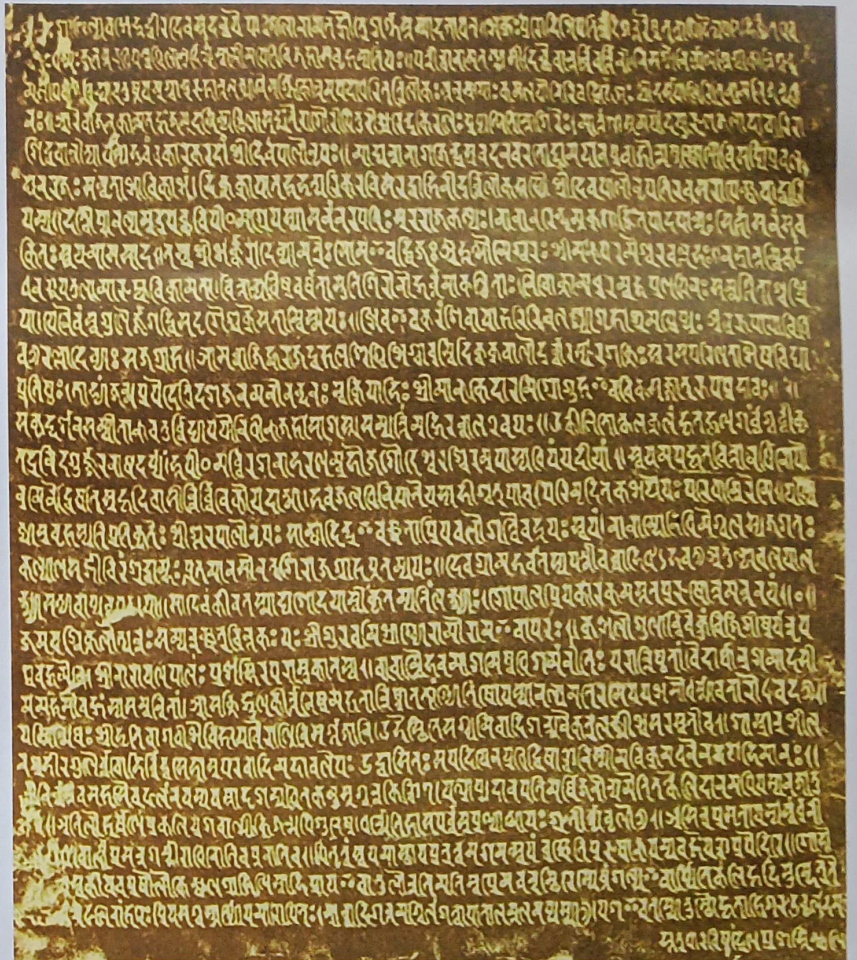
accession of Nagabhat aII in c. CE 795 estimated by V.B. Mishra (Mishra 1966: 22-24) instead of c. CE 808 by B.N. Puri (Puri 1957: 42), one is compelled to either take the defeat of Cakrāyudha and Dharmapāla at the end of the latter's rule in the last decade of the eighth century or to argue that this second phase of GP-Āyudha struggle took place during the early years of Devapāla who tried to help his father's young friend Cakrāyudha but failed as suggested in the Jodhpur plate of Bauka.²⁰ Further the repeated reference to Dharma as the king of Gauḍa, Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla need not be necessarily taken in the physical sense of the terms of reference, for even in the Arab geographical sources, the farthest limits of southeastern Bengal is described to have been ruled by Dharmapāla (Chakravarti 2002a: 165). It seems that the name Dharma became a generic representative for the polities of Bengal in the contemporary records beyond the region.

It is surprising to note that while the GP king Nāgabhaṭa II occupied Kānyakubja and shifted his headquarters there for Rajasthan, neither the RK Govinda III nor Dharmapāla ever aspired to annexe the city, although both of them had captured it. The claim of Devapāla that his father was the lord of all the cardinal quarters is exaggerated and represents a stereotypical narrative of the *Cakravartīkṣetra*. However, the areas described in the Indian Museum and the Khalimpur plates to have been occupied by him considering his political base in the south Bihar-north Bengal plains quite impressive. D.C. Sircar has placed Bhoja in the Berar region, Matsya around Jaypur, Madra in Sialkot, Kuru in Delhi

and Meerut, Yadu in Gujarat, Yavana in the northwest, Avantī around the western Malwa region, Gāndhāra in the Peshwar region and Kīra in the Kangra region (Sircar 1982a: 59)²¹. In any case, the claim of suzerainty along 'the entire sweep of the Indo-Gangetic plain from the north-west to Bengal with extensions into the Malwa corridor and Vidarbha' coupled with the ability to donate the chair of Kānyakubja to a person of his choice will lead one to believe that Dharmapāla was definitely a powerful ruler of northern India at least in the earlier half of his reign. Geopolitical horizon of the Pāla dominion extended during the reign of Dharmapāla's son Devapāla, while the fate of his other son Tribhuvanapāla alias Haravarṣa remains unknown. Devapāla must have initially suffered from raids from the GP Nāgabhaṭa and the contemporary Tibetan monarch, but subsequently he regained form the queer situation as his own inscription and those of his successors till Nārāyaṇapāla suggest. While the narratives of the Pan-Indian empire credited to him in the Badal Garuda Pillar inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla (Keilhorn 1894a, Maitreya 2004:70-85, Sircar 1982b: 194-95) are stereotyped, the claims of win over the Utkala, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla and the Gurjara appear reasonable. But the identity of the Gurjara king is again problematic. He is not likely to have been Nāgabhaṭa II's son Rāmabhadra, as suggested by Mishra (Mishra 1966: 26), for this king ruled according to Mishra from c. CE 833 to 836 and was not powerful enough to have threatened the Pāla monarch. The more reasonable probability is that of Nāgabhaṭa II in the later years of reign. In that case, the only way to explain the claim of Bhoja that he defeated Dharmas

son is to have a reinvestigation of the three years allotted to Rāmabhadra when in fact Bhoja probably had made a sudden thrust against Devapāla to retaliate the defeat of his grandfather at the hands of the latter. The Kamboja referred to in the inscription of this king would have come either from the northwestern (Pakistan-Afghanistan) or the northeastern (Tibetan) frontiers, though D.C. Sircar explicitly favours the latter assumption on linguistic, Tibetan legendary as well as later epigraphic sources. Although his conquests over the Huṇa and the Drāviḍa are also not easily understandable, the massive aerial flights commissioned by his and his son Mahendrapāla's composers that Devapāla was the 'stage director of the drama of great wars' (for e.g., *mahā-samara-nāṭaka-sūtradhāraḥ*, found in the Tulabhita plate) do not appear to have been complete exaggerations. His direct rule over Bihar is clearly revealed by his Munger and Nalanda grants, while his sway up to the Varanasi region is clearly proved by the Lucknow Museum plate of his younger son Śūrapāla I whose mother was stationed at the city on the other side of the river Kalmaṣanāśa (i.e., modern Karamnasha forming the boundary between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), while the executor of the plate was a provincial ruler of Vyāghrataṭī on the Bhagirathi in the northern sector of Murshidabad.

Devapāla's religious leanings and patronage towards Buddhism have strong empirical support that deserves note. The Ghoshrawa eulogy records Devapāla's favours to Vīradeva, a Buddhist preceptor who came to Magadha and stayed there in the Yaśovarmapura vihāra (Keilhorn 1888, Maitreya 2004: 45-54). The Nalanda plate on the other hand makes reference to grant of five villages to a monastery at Nalanda



constructed by the Southeast Asian Śailendra ruler Balaputradeva.

Top:
Badal Pillar Inscription of
Nārāyaṇapāla

The period between Devapāla and Śūrapāla I is of paramount significance and has been subjected to several



Image Source: Keilhorn
1894a, p. 160

Left:
Image of Pañcika of
Devapāla's 3rd Regnal
Year

Image Source: Hunting-
ton 1984, Figure 28

discussions by a number of scholars, for it has permanently altered a major hypothesis on Pāla-GP political relations. The entire bibliography of the Pāla rule before the discovery of this plate suggest that after Śūrapāla I, the rulers of Vākpāla's line came to dominate Pāla polity starting with Nārāyaṇapāla whose date was fixed by Sircar from the mid ninth to the early tenth century. As already noted, R.D. Banerji's discovery of the inscriptions bearing the name of one Mahendrapāla prompted him to invoke the theory of Gurjara occupation of Magadha. This hypothesis provided a plank for the coining of the second set of hypotheses of tripartite and subsequently quadripartite struggle involving these two polities. The date ranges of both Nārāyaṇapāla and GP Mahendrapāla I (the latter consecrated around c. CE 890 to rule till c. CE 907) fit so well into the then available sources on the Pāla-GP history of the period that the proponent of and subscribers to this theory readily argued that the Mahendrapāla of the dedicatory records of eastern India was actually the GP king of that name who gained a strong footage in Gauḍa-Magadha in the ninth-tenth century subduing the contemporary Pāla monarch Nārāyaṇapāla. The complete absence of Nārāyaṇapāla's record between his seventeenth and fifty-fourth years also made sufficient room to insert GP Mahendrapāla I and surmise that after hiding for this intervening phase Nārāyaṇapāla regained his throne at Magadha sometime before his fifty-fourth ruling year. But the discovery of this new copperplate has permanently discarded this myth of GP Mahendrapāla I ruling in Bengal-Bihar. While he had apparently no role to play in the combat, the situation gets further complicated,

after the inclusion of the two new rulers in the Pāla genealogy, as Bhoja is now found have been a contemporary of at least four Pāla rulers from Mahendrapāla to Nārāyaṇapāla, an issue to which I shall return.

Some preliminary observations on this phase of struggle between Bengal and Kānyakunbja may be relevant. First of all, it is clear from extraneous epigraphic evidences that though the role of the Āyudha dynasty in this conflict can hardly be denied, the adjectives applied to Cakrāyudha in the Gwalior inscription in no sense portrays the image of an imperial political stature. It is also quite curious that a lineage which had at least three rulers in succession on the throne of Kanauj never issued a single copperplate proclaiming their presence there. Thus, the powerful and mighty status ascribed to the Āyudha kings, on the basis of two references in literary texts, seems to have been an overemphasis (Sircar 1982a: 58, 1985a: 6,16)²². Secondly, it is difficult, as it is illustrated above, to understand how Dharmapāla played the role of the sole representative of Gauḍa in this struggle the eighth and early ninth centuries balancing between two generations of all the other three power bases. Thirdly, the Tulabhita plate proves that GP Mahendrapāla I ruling in the late ninth-early tenth centuries never had anything to do with Bengal-Bihar and therefore, the phase visualized as the era of exclusive GP dominance in eastern India is now to be found as possibly the only phase of a sustained break in the entire contour of Pāla-GP conflict when Nārāyaṇapāla ruled peacefully for more than half a century without any raids. Finally, the removal of Bhoja's son from the scene and the

discovery of new Pāla rulers between Devapāla and Nārāyaṇapāla will show that Bhoja was on the GP throne during the reigns of all the four kings between the two mentioned above. And this chronological frame is further significant, for there is no claim in the GP records of the period, other than Devapāla's defeat in the hands of Bhoja which must have been short-lived for reasons irrelevant here, of tassel with the Pāla. Thus, the entire span of Bhojas rule in Kanauj saw a phase of stable extension of the Pāla empire in eastern-northern India, excepting the early phase of Bhoja's reign involving his victorious campaign against Devapāla. On the whole, the new discoveries in the east and the reconsideration of the comparative chronology show a thorough and revealing shift in the contours of regional power structures of north India on a broader canvas. The Tulabhita plate does not furnish any specific data regarding the political profile of this Pāla monarch, who is surprisingly not mentioned in any of the subsequent Pāla records except the Siyan inscription of Nayapāla²³, from the testimony of Śūrapāla I's inscriptions noted above coupled with the evidence of the still unpublished Sarnath image dated in his reign (AR-ASI: 1907-08: 75). But it is quite convenient to believe that Śūrapāla I had held sway over considerably larger territories in Bengal-Bihar-Uttar Pradesh along the mainstream Gangetic route. He possibly inherited this tract from his elder brother Mahendrapāla who in turn had received it from Devapāla.

The evidences that necessitated the second major alteration of the Pāla genealogy was a set of three copperplates from the reign of Śūrapāla I's son Gopāla who is now numbered Gopāla II. Nothing

specifically is so far known about this king excepting that he had his capitals at Sohana and Mahasala and that he had control over Puṇḍravardhana province with districts of which at least one, viz. the Sthalikata *viṣaya* (evidently the Sthalikkata *viṣaya* of Dharmapāla's inscription), was inherited from his predecessors' territories.

It is interesting to note that some administrative officers of the rank of mostly army chiefs and subordinates are regularly found to have patronized Buddhist religious institutions and in all the cases such activities are being endorsed by the central authorities

by way of permanent endowments made in favour of such institutions. The remarks on the issue by the decipherer of the Indian Museum and the Mohipur plates in the context of the former deserve citation (Furui 2011b: 150-51):

The acts of mahasāmanta Bhadranaga recorded in this inscription conform to the pattern of donation witnessed in some

Below:

Image of Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni Triumphant over Māra, c. 11th century CE

Image Source: Huntington 1990, p. 20.



of the early Pāla grants, namely, the establishment of religious institutions by subordinate rulers and their petition for land or village donations to the king. In the Khalimpur plate of Dharmapāla, mahasāmāntadhipati Narayanavarman asked the king to donate four villages to the deity Nūnnanarayana established by him. Similarly, the Jagajjibanpur plate of Mahendrapāla and the Mohipur plate of Gopāla II record the construction of Buddhist viharas and the petitions for donation by mahasenapati Vajradeva and mahasainyapati Kokkaka respectively. The present case is comparable to the last two also in terms of the format of the inscription, which contains the genealogy of the subordinate ruler, though its location is different from that of these inscriptions.

The composite set of evidence found in these Pāla inscriptions is expected to provoke explorations into patterns of royal patronage under local autonomy vis-à-vis the role of the central authority on the broader processes of legitimization of polity.

THE NEW BEGINNING: FROM VIGRAHAPĀLA I TO VIGRAHAPĀLA III

The first two members of the second line named Vākpāla and Jayapāla are known only from references in other members' inscriptions and literary accounts. Similarly, Huntingtons arguments for more-than-a-decade long rule of Vigrahapāla I do not seem to have sufficient grounds. Thus, the rule of the second line has to initiate with Nārāyaṇapāla, who was previously supposed to have spent more than two-third of his political life in exile. Although

now it can be conveniently argued, on the basis of his copperplate recording grant in north Bihar (Tira *bhukti*) and an image carved in Bihar Sharif showing his latest date so far known (Banerji 1915), that he enjoyed dominance over entire Bihar and passed it on to his son Rājyapāla II. The sources dated in Nārāyaṇapāla's time do not supply any significant information about his own rule. However, both the Bhagalpur plate and the Badal stone eulogy are reliable evidences for understanding of the political profile of his predecessors; the former also proves that this ruler was the first in the family to embrace Śaiva faith shifting from the Buddhist doctrine of his ancestors.

Rājyapāla II was earlier believed to have ruled only in Bihar and the non-availability of major epigraphic evidences from Bengal from the time of Devapāla onwards had led scholars to believe that the Pāla dominion came to be

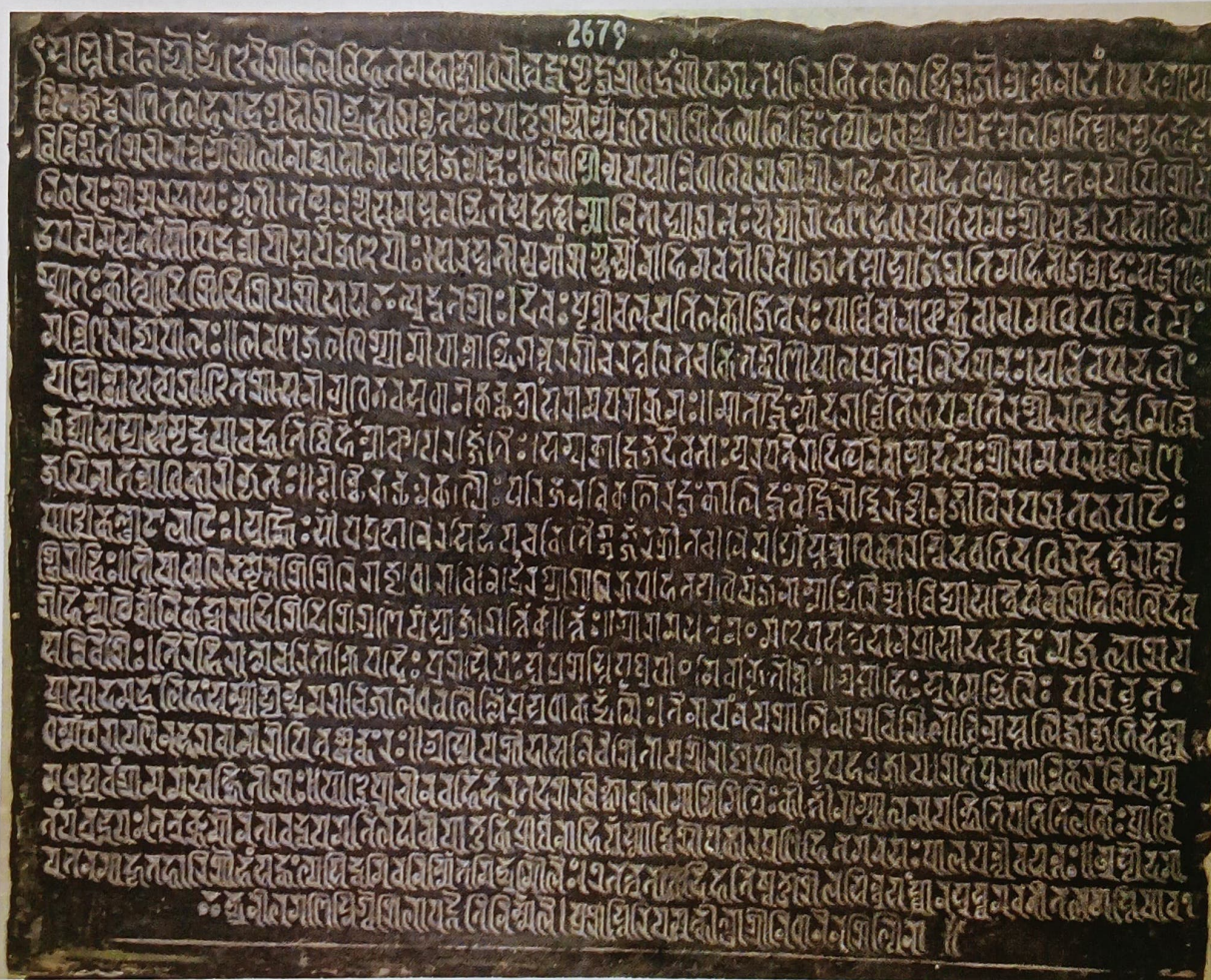


Right:
10th century image of
Umā-Maheśvara found
from Bangladesh

Image source- Haque,
2008, plate no-18

confined to the southern Bihar region and was gradually being divided probably into smaller principalities (Majumdar 1971: 134-35, Chakrabarti 2010: 99). But the Bhaturiya inscription from the Rajshahi district offers some crucially significant information. First of all, this is a unique epigraph representing a hybrid composition involving characteristics of

Sircar rightly remarks that the reasons behind conflict with the Pāṇḍya, Kaṇṇāṭa and the Lāṭa are difficult to understand, while the Kṛta was a Muslim principality of northwest and the Mleccha were probably Arab Muslims. Note that Kaliṅga had a different geographical connotation from Oḍra and the connections of Suhma with the latter needs reinvestigation,



Left :
Bhaturiya
Inscription of Rājyapāla
II

Image source-: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/62/Bhaturia_Inscription_of_Rajapala_at_Varendra_Research_Museum.jpg

a *karaśāsana* and a *Praśasti* (for *karaśāsana*, refer Sircar 1965a: 111-14), where a village was donated to a Śiva temple built by a minister of the king against a nominal tax of 100 *purana*/annum. But the high-sounding claims of the political exploits of the king demand examination. It proclaims that he subdued the Mleccha, Aṅga, Kaliṅga, Vaṅga, Oḍra, Pāṇḍya, Kaṇṇāṭa, Lāṭa, Suhma, Gurjara, Kṛta and the Cīna. D.C.

particularly because a segment of Rāḍha encompassed Suhma adjacent to Utkala/Oḍra for a considerably long span of history and this tract formed a major route of communication from western Bengal through the northern and western Odishan corridor. The march against Aṅga would have resulted presumably from a local upsurge, while Vaṅga is known to have been occupied by the Candras with its epicentre at Vikramapura. On

account of literary reference to Tibet as China, D.C. Sircar equates Rājyapāla's China adversaries with the Kamboja enemies of Devapāla, although it is *prima facie* impossible to explain the renaming of the group within a span of less than a century. Considering his reference in the inscription of Gopālavarman of Kāmarūpa as Gauḍarāja (Sarma 2003: II/113, Sharma 1978: 214, 218) and repeated claims of Devapāla's campaigns against Kāmarūpa further reflected in Nārāyaṇapāla's Bhagalpur plate, it appears that Pāla-Kāmarūpa conflict was in fact in smouldering continuity of the broader Kānyakubja-Gauḍa polity (for details, Choudhury 1988: 108-33)²⁴. A second Kamboja lineage headed by Śaiva Kuñjaraghātavarṣa (c. CE 915-25, according to Sircar 1982b: 181) having his solitary inscription at Bangarh claiming his identity as Gauḍapati (Chanda 1975: 41, Westmacott 1872 for reading by Rajendralal Mitra), probably snatched north Bengal from Rājyapāla II, who possibly regained the territory sometime before the issuance of the Bhaturiya inscription. That the Pāla-Kamboj relation remained cordial afterwards is shown by the homogeneity of names of the Kamboja Rājyapāla and his wife Bhāgyadevī with Pāla king and his consort of the same name.

The two rulers succeeding Rājyapāla II were Gopāla III and Vīgrahapāla II. While this third Gopāla has no important epigraphic record after the sixth year found from Jajilpara in Malda, this inscription is a fair indicator of his reign in north Bengal and south Bihar, for the record was issued from south Bihar at Vaṭaparvatikā (which is one of the two properly identifiable administrative headquarters of the

Pāla kings) and land was granted in northern Bengal. It is further important in the area of administration that while Kuḍḍalakhāṭaka here appears as a *viṣaya* level administrative centre, it was the administrative camp from where the Tulabhita plate of Mahendrapāla was issued. One major political issue of this phase was the Pāla-Candra conflict in the eastern sector of the delta. The discovery of the famous Ganesa image from Mandhuk has been accepted as an indicator of sustained Pāla supremacy within Candra dominion towards southeast (Sanyal 1950). The claims in



the plates of Śrīcandra on the other hand that he reinstalled (*saṁropaṇa*) Gopāla and returned his besieged consort to the Pāla king leaves no room to doubt that at the later part of Gopāla III's reign the Candra lineage again regained

Right :

Ganeṣa image of Mandhuk

Image source: <https://www.sahapedia.org/image-inscriptions-what-can-they-tell-us-about-our-cultural-history>

independence in eastern-southeastern Bengal. Although recent discoveries and new approaches to existing ones will lead one to assign more-than-a-decade of kingship to Vīgrahapāla II, the polity of the period remains unknown until new epigraphic material surface.

As noted in the beginning, the inception of Mahīpāla I's rule has been viewed by earlier scholars as the establishment of the second Pāla empire. D.C. Sircar had rightly repudiated this theory of revival since there was no acute crisis in the immediately succeeding phases as already discussed in the foregoing. But the reign of Mahīpāla I certainly witnessed events that set it apart from that of his predecessors in the preceding century. The issue of the retrieval of *pīṭya rājya* claimed in his inscriptions and that of *janaka-bhū* mentioned in Kamauli plate (Maitra 2004: 127-46, Venis 1894) and the *Rāmācarita* (Sastri 1969: 26) remains problematic, for there is no evidence that the possession of north Bengal was at stake unless new evidences prove that Kunjaraghtavarsa's successors continued to battle against the precursors of Mahīpāla I; the Nayapāla of the second Kamboja line possibly took his name from the king of the same name who succeeded Mahīpāla I on the Pāla throne. Another important issue is the discovery of dedicatory records recording the name of this king from two sites in southeastern Bengal. While such discoveries might apparently seem to be stray or results of locally transported evidences, if one considers the report of the Kāmarūpa ruler regarding the defeat of the Gauḍa king in the hands of Trailokyacandra, a counter-attack in the peripheral Candra dominion might not be altogether devoid

of substance, particularly considering the aforementioned claim made by Śrīcandra.

The politically more significant developments of the reign of this king had greater concern with contemporary south Indian politics. The temporary defeat inflicted on the Pāla by Kalacuri Gāṅgeyadeva (c. CE 1010-41) was quickly retaliated by Mahīpāla I as suggested by the discovery of his inscriptions in the Banāres region which his predecessors must have won in an opportune drawn from the Kalachuri-GP conflicts, though the identity of the Vaṅgāla king defeated by Tripuri Kalachuri Lakṣmaṇarāja in the second half of the tenth century is difficult to realize (Ganguly 1966: 61, Sircar 1982b: 82; for Kalachuri-GP quarrel, Mishra 1966: 45). However, D.C. Sircar recovers from Arab sources that Gāṅgeya made a sharp comeback in the Banāres area within c. CE 1034. This clearly reflects the Kalachuri ambition in extending power base from central India to the middle Ganga Valley into the Varanasi area via the Satna-Rewa-Mirzapur route (Chakrabarti 2010:119). The inscription of Rājendracola dated CE 1021 makes claims of winning victory over a number of local rulers of Tanḍabhukti, Takkanaladam, Uttiraladam and Vaṅgāla-deśa. The list of kings is: 1. Dharmapāla of Daṇḍabhukti, definitely a predecessor of Kamboja Nayapāla, 2. Raṇāsura of Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha, possibly ruling in the Garh Mandaran area on the Bankura-Hooghly border, 3. Sangu and his overlord Mahīpāla in the Uttara Rāḍha and 4. Govindacandra, the last member of the Candra dynasty of Vaṅgāla (Hultzsch 1981, Shastri 1955:251-52). Sircar makes emphasis on the defeat of Mahīpāla I's subordinate Sangu rather

than the Pāla king himself in the hands of the Cola army. While Sircars remark that the Cola expedition indirectly helped Mahīpāla I to conquer southwestern Bengal suffers from self contradiction²⁵, K.A.N. Shastri rightly identifies him with the Pāla monarch (Shastri 1937)²⁶. One intriguing point to note however is that if Mahīpāla I was physically involved in the struggle in northern *Rāḍha* and this seems quite plausible because he is exclusively mentioned in that context in his sway over that region in the early eleventh century has also to be accepted.

In spite of the rapid sequence of upheavals, this king ruled for no less than forty-eight years and donated lands in the two major subdivisions of northern Bengal. Of these the more significant one was the Pañcanāgarī *viṣaya* that reappears as an administrative division after nearly six hundred years. Of equal interest are his donations towards Pāśupata Śaiva preceptors at the cloister at Bangarh, as revealed from an inscription of his son (Sircar 1973-74, 1982b: 85-101). Mahīpāla's son Nayapāla ruled for at least fifteen years and the spatial distribution of five epigraphic documents²⁷ of his time from northern Bengal through western Bengal to south Bihar is quite impressive. That the protracted encounters and negotiations between the Pāla and the Kalachuri polities continued till the time of Nayapāla are known from Kalachuri inscriptions, where Gāṅgeya's son Karṇa is described to have been the conqueror of Gauḍa and Vaṅga. The subjugation of Karṇa by Nayapāla on the other is indicated by Tibetan legendary accounts referring to a treaty between the two as well as a further clash during the reign

of Vighrahapāla III in which he came out victoriously resulting in matrimonial tie with Karṇa's daughter Yauvanaśrī as alluded to by Sandhyākaranandin (Sircar 1982a: 85, 1982b:115). Interestingly enough, there is concrete inscriptional corroboration of claims of both the parties. The defeat of Gauḍa (Nayapāla) is recorded in an inscription from Paikore in the Birbhum district (AR-ASI 1921-22: 115, Majumdar 1971: 146)²⁸, while the victory of Nayapāla over the Kalachuri is mentioned in the Siyan inscription of Nayapāla. The recent notice of a dedicatory inscription during the reign of this king at a site called Mandalgram in Bardhaman is also interesting (Sanyal 2006).

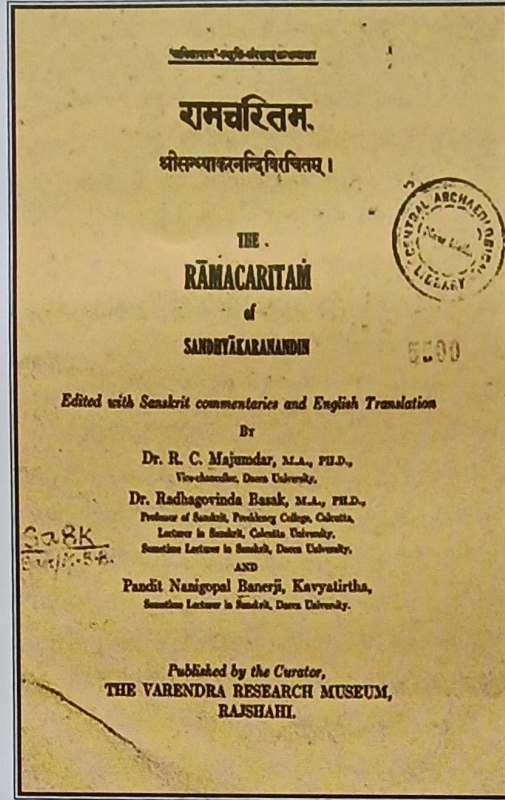
The three inscriptions from Gaya allude to the existence of a subordinate Brahman family:

1. Śūdraka, son of Paritoṣa, 2. Viśvarūpa alias Viśvāditya, son of Śūdraka and 3. Yakṣapāla, son of Viśvarūpa. Their consistent recognition of the sovereignty of Nayapāla in their records will lead one to exclude any possibility of an internal struggle. The significance of the Śaiva donation by Nayapāla has already been underlined. One has to note that a second line of struggle was aligned with south Kosala under Somavamsi Maḥāśivagupta Yayati, presumably during the reign of Nayapāla and again the western Cālukya Vikramāditya, successor of Someśvara I Āvahamalla (c. CE 1044-68) in the second half of the eleventh century. However, it seems chronologically more justifiable to place the last battle in the reign of one of the two elder sons of Vighrahapāla III than himself, as generally believed (Sircar 1982b: 86, Chakrabarti 2010:119). While no complete land transfer record of the

time of Nayapāla has so far surfaced, the three records of the time of his son from north Bengal and south Bihar again makes it difficult to think of any crisis due to the Cālukya attacks.

THE LAST CENTURY OF PĀLA RULE: ŚŪRAPĀLA II TO MADANAPĀLA AND BEYOND

The reigns of Vighrahapāla III's sons Mahīpāla II and Śūrapāla II do not offer any specific information, but the manuscripts cited above will clearly indicate that they ruled for nearly a decade and only this considerable span falling roughly between c. AD 1067 and 1075 can allow one to incorporate the Cālukya raid which is too early to be contemporary with the reign of Vighrahapāla III²⁹. It is difficult to believe that the Pīṭhī lineage of Gaya revolted against any of these rulers, as the Pīṭhīpati Bhīmayaśas, the lord of Magadha, helped Rāmapāla to regain parts of north Bengal. The identity and geographical affiliation of *mahāmāṇḍalika* Īśvaraghoṣa who ruled for no less than thirty five years is however intriguing. While his power base is unanimously accepted to have been located at Dhekkari in the north-western Bardhaman where one also comes across considerable archaeological evidence of early medieval settlements around the Gaurangapur area, the land donated in his inscription was located in the northern Bengal plains. The more convincing issue is that of the *Kaivartta* (fishermen) revolt that brought Rāmapāla onto the Pāla throne in connection with the much-discussed reoccupation of north Bengal by this Pāla ruler. According to *Rāmacarita*, the Varendra sector of north Bengal was besieged by the Kaivartta chief Divya, followed by his brother Rudoka and



Left :

Title Page of *Rāmacarita*
of Sandhyākaranandin
published by Varendra
Research Museum in
1939

Rudoka's son Bhīma. That this revolt had a connection with a larger scale of polity is indicated by the *Rāmacarita* that refers to raids in Varendri by the RK Śivaraja simultaneously with the revolt of Bhīma, further intensified by the attacks of the Vaṅga king Hari who has to be identified with Harivarma of eastern Bengal. In his expedition to wrest Varendra Rāmapāla was assisted by his RK maternal uncle Mathana and his son and nephews, besides a number of local chiefs. The list of the feudatories includes:

1. Pīṭhīpati, the lord of Magadha and conqueror of Kānyakubja, named Bhīmayaśas.
2. The *dakṣiṇa-simhāsana-cakravartti* Viraguna of Koṭāṭavi.
3. Jayasimha of Daṇḍabhukti who had defeated the Somāvaṁśī Utkala king Karṇakeśarī.
4. Vikramarāja of Bālavalabhī located near Deva grāma.
5. Lakṣmīsura of Aparamandara styled as *āṭavika-sāmantacakra-cūḍamaṇi*. He must have been a descendant of

Raṇaśūra of northern Rāḍha, defeated by Rājendracola. 6. Śūrapāla of Kujavatī. 7. Rudraśikhara of Tailakampa. 8. Bhāskara alias Mayamallasimha of Ucchala. 9. Pratāpasimha of Dhekkari whose relation with Īśvaraghoṣa remains uncertain. 10. Narasimhārjuna of Kayangala *maṇḍala*. 11. Caṇḍārjuna of Saṁkaṭa *grāma*. 12. Vijayarāja of Nidrāvalī. 13. Dvorapavarddhana of Kauśāmbī and 14. Soma of Paduvanba *maṇḍala* (Sastri 1969: 38, cited in Sircar 1982a: 89-90)³⁰.

Many of these peripheral polities can be identified. The pīṭhī were located in Bodh Gaya; Koṭāṭavī (*lit.* 'the forest fort') is more likely to have been the forested Dumnigarh area to the east of Bishnupur in Bankura extending into the present Garh Mandaran (i.e. Aparamandara) forest in Hooghly which was the core territory of the circle of feudatories of the forest, for the chief of this principality has been called the crest jewel of the circle;³¹ Daṇḍabhukti was modern Dantan in West Medinipur; Kujavati has been identified by Sircar with the area to the north of Dumka in Santhal Parganas; Dhekkari in this case was definitely Dhekur in Bardhaman; Tailakampa is the submerged temple site of Telkupi in Puruliya; Kayangala is modern Kankjol that formed a separate provincial division under Lakṣmaṇasena with the name Kankagrāma; Vijayarāja is usually identified with Vijayasena of the Sena lineage; identification of Kauśāmbī with Kusumbī in north Bengal will imply a new line of force geographically widely separated from all the other chiefs of western Bengal; the case of Paduvanva identified with Pabna suffers from the same problem.

However, the overall configuration of the growth of these local principalities during the time of Rāmapāla, coupled with a few contemporary to his predecessor Mahīpāla I, would lead one to surmise that a steady and extensive intraregional process of political formation characterized the polity in this sector of early medieval Bengal from the early eleventh century under certain *maṇḍala* or *cakra* (both signifying a confederate circle) that evolved in less than one century into prominent foci of microscopic power structures in the eastern fringe areas of the Chhotanagpur plateau.

It will be rewarding to inquire if the genesis of a large number of medieval *bhūma* territories in this precise belt ultimately culminating in the growth of the *Mallabhūma* in the Bankura-Puruliya-West Medinipur regions, encompassing at least one of the principalities involved in Rāmapāla's endeavour, had its genesis in the broader context of Pāla polity in the eleventh century. The allusion in the *Rāmacarita* to the struggle between Rāmapāla and the rulers of Utkala and Kalinga has possibly a reasonable corroboration in Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga's inscriptions. An almost identical claim by Kulottuṅgacola however demands further evidence (Sircar 1982a: 91)³². It is unfortunate to note that though he ruled for fifty-three years with his base at Rāmāvatī (identifiable with the extensive site of Amati in Malda) in north Bengal, all the records of the time of his reign are Political History and Administration personal donations and are concentrated in Bihar only. Rāmapāla had four sons of whom only Kumārapāla definitely had a

share of the throne before Madanapāla, as his minister Vaidyadeva ruled for at least four years according to his Kamauli inscription which shows that Kāmarūpa continued to form a part of the Pāla dominion annexed earlier. But Sircars allotment of two years for him based on the above theoretical assumption lacks any direct evidence and at the present state of information there is no justification in including this king in the list of members who actually enjoyed the throne. He was succeeded on throne by his son Gopāla who is now Gopāla IV. He ruled for fifteen years as so far known, but no copperplate of his reign is yet reported. However, the contents of a commemorative inscription from Nimdighi in the Rajshahi district recording his name has led scholars like R.C. Majumdar and D.C. Sircar to permanently discard some unjust scars of cowardly attributes attached to his personality by R.D. Banerji earlier. The Nimdighi inscription refers to his death in the battlefield, although both the epigraph and the epigraphists are silent about the identity of this enemy (Sircar 1965b).

Gopāla IV was succeeded on throne by Madanapāla, the last known paramount ruler of the dynasty. The reign period of this king is of momentous significance as it provides the only telltale evidence of a corroborative date in a dedicatory inscription from southern Bihar on which the whole issue of reconstruction of the Pāla chronology has to rest. Three years after the coronation of Madanapāla, Gahadavala Govindacandra issued his Lar plate from his base at Mudgagiri, having already his presence felt by the end of Rāmapāla's reign as shown by his Maner copperplate (Sircar 1982b:

95). On the other hand, Vijayasena, the historical founder of the Sena family also probably exerted periodical blows to the Pāla supremacy in Bengal-Bihar having his strong base initially in the *Rāḍha* sector, if his identity as Vijayaraja of Nidrauli is accepted. The Antichak inscription of Māsanikeśa alludes to the conflict between the Gauḍa and the Vaṅga kings in which the former succeeded with helps from Sahura, father of Māsanikeśa (Sircar 1972-73, 1979a: 23-8). The Rajghat inscription on the other hand records the construction of a Śaiva temple at Varanasi by one Bhīmadeva who is convincingly believed to be identical with Madanapāla's minister of the same name recorded in the Manahali copperplate. The second major event was the aggression of the Gāṅgā king of Kalinga named Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga who is stated to have vanquished Mandara (certainly the Aparamandara of *Rāmacarita*) besieging the Aramya city (modern Arambagh in the Hooghly district) and in this onslaught he was assisted by his friend (*sakhā*) Vijayasena as suggested in the *Vallālacarita* (Dhar 1904: 24). The route of Coḍagaṅga from the southwestern district of West Medinipur through the Chandrakona-Ghatal sector straight into Garh Mandaran via Bandar and finally to Arambagh in Hooghly would firstly strengthen the probability of Vijayasena's early connections with this region and will further vindicate that the local polity of this territory under the Sura lineage was still quite vibrant in the middle of the twelfth century. D.C. Sircar believes that Madanapāla must have had formed an alliance with Vijayasena during his raid into the Gahadavala heartland in Uttar Pradesh. But this friendship acted

as an interval in the general sequence of hatred, renewed by the raids from the Kālīṅga direction. That the Pāla polity was in decline in the second half of the twelfth century is clearly reflected in the Rajghat inscription where Bhīmadeva boasts of acting as the saviour of the sinking (*vāridhimadhya-guptam*) glory of the Gauḍa dominion from the attacks of the king of Kālīṅga and the ruler of the Rāyāri lineage, the latter identified with the contemporary local polity of the Sylhet region, though this is difficult to prove (Sircar 1982b: 136-39).

It appears from a review of the geochronology of the so far known inscriptions of Madanapāla that the Pāla dynasty had lost political control over northern Bengal in the later years of his reign and the strong sweep of friendship and enmity with Vijayasena finally acted in the favour of this Sena king who soon held sway over Bengal with his seat at Vikramapura. However, the Pāla kings retained their control over Bihar-Bengal at least till the early years of Madanapāla's reign is clear from the distribution of their epigraphic documents in the region.

Most of the historians dealing in the polity of the Pāla dynasty, most significantly including D.C. Sircar, believed that the dedicatory inscriptions and manuscripts dated in the ruling as well as the lost years of two kings named Govindapāla and Palapāla are records of Madanapāla's successors. While the latest known date of Govindapāla comes from a manuscript dated in his thirty-ninth year, D.C. Sircar allows four years to him without any explanation. The latest known date of Palapāla on the other hand is thirty-five and this is readily accepted by Sircar on

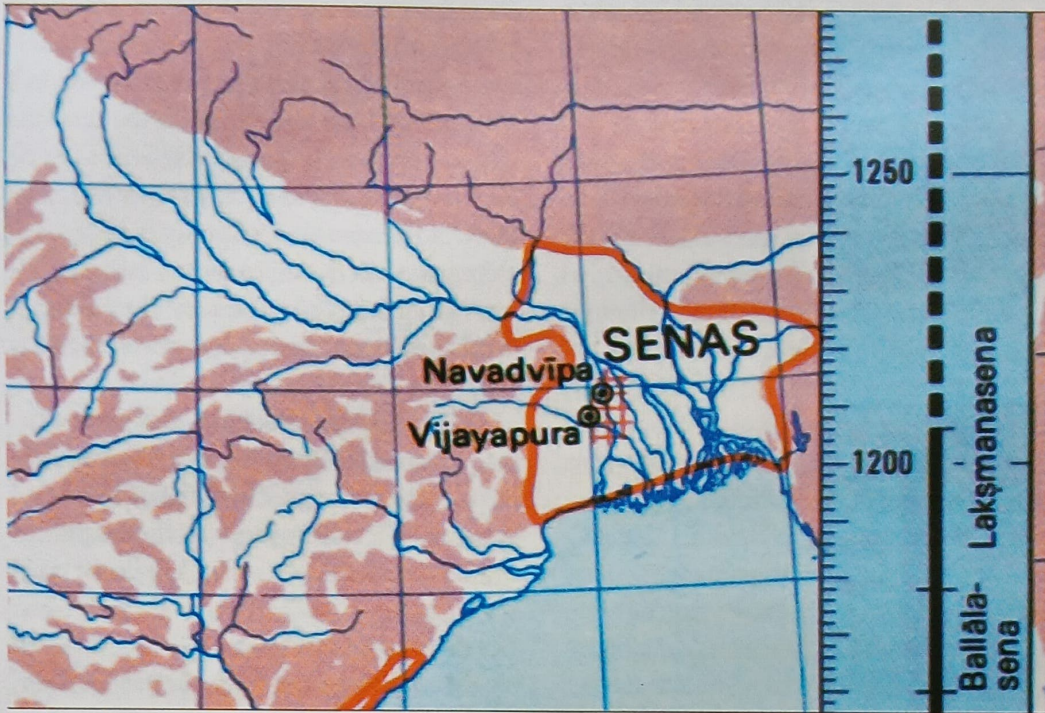
equally unreasonable grounds. So far there is no reason to take these rulers as members of the imperial Pāla line, since their relationship with Madanapāla is nowhere indicated in any source. Further their chronological status is also absolutely unknown.³³

However, one has to note that one's knowledge base on Pāla polity is fast-changing with the discovery of every next inscription and this is equally applicable for these rulers, since their consistence reference as ruling kings obviously suggests that they managed safe niches in the polity in southern Bihar in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. The issue of much debated Pāla rule beyond north Bengal should be briefly addressed.

The discovery of two sets of dedicatory records of the times of Gopāla III and Mahīpāla I have been accepted as convenient evidences for advocating in the favour of Pāla rule in the Comilla-Tippera region. Notice has also been made to the recent report of an inscription of the time of Nayapāla from a region close to the site of the Pāla-Kalacuri battle in western Bengal in the eleventh century. While these records hardly denote any permanent political possession³⁴, the context of the discovery at Mandalgram and the precise time frame covered by these evidences from the second half of the tenth to the first half of the eleventh centuries will compel one to believe that at least at different points of this time bracket the common populace in these respective regions temporarily recognized the authority of these Pāla kings.

THE SENA PERIOD: POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

kingdom. The most dependable source for the study of political history of the Sena, however, remains the famous *Praśasti*



Left :
Political Map of Sena
Territory

Image source: <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/pager.html?object=185>

The fall of the longest polity in Bihar-Bengal paved way for a new Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava lineage in the same region with Sena name-ending. Twelve copperplate inscriptions of the Sena kings so far discovered from the different geographical cultural terrains of West Bengal and Bangladesh indicate that this lineage politically consolidated the largest part of the delta within a very short frame extending a little over a century from the late eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries. Besides, two major panegyrics from Bangladesh and three dedicatory records from Paikore in West Bengal (AR-ASI 1921-22: 78-79, Majumdar 1929: 168), Dhaka in Bangladesh (Majumdar 1929: 116-17) and Sanokhar near Bhagalpur in Bihar (Sircar 1958f: 78-82, 1982b: 154-57, 1983:123) help trace the geographical horizon of their

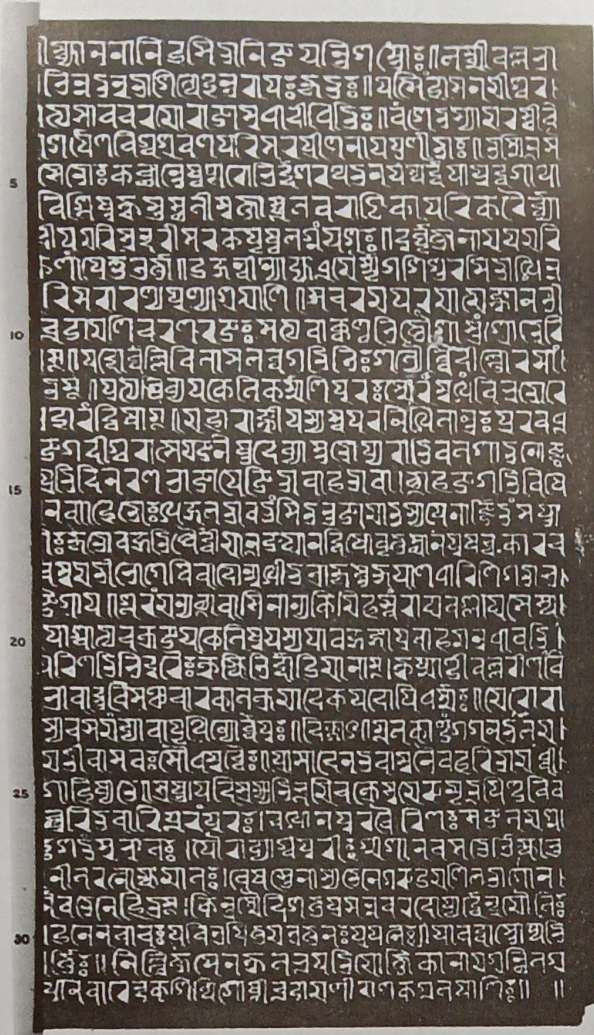
of Vijayasena from Deopara in Rajshahi, coupled with the recent discovery of a stone panegyric dated in the sixth ruling year of Lakṣmaṇasena from the village of Bagbari in the Nababganj (former Rajshahi) district of Bangladesh (Haque and Kuddus 200 5b).

The inscriptions of Vijayasena and his successors report that the Sena lineage started with Virasena, followed by Sāmantasena and Hemantasena, whose historicity is not directly proved. The first historical monarch of the family was Vijayasena who was a contemporary of the last sovereign Pāla king Madanapāla. Vijaya's four followers ruled from the middle of the twelfth to the first quarter of the thirteenth centuries (Figure 10). The lineage expressly claims its southern origin and further proclaims its *Brahma-*

Right :
Deopara
Inscription of
Vijayasena

Below :
Ruins of Bal-
laldhipi at Nadia
District

Image Source:
<https://nadia.gov.in/gallery/bal-lal-dhipi/>

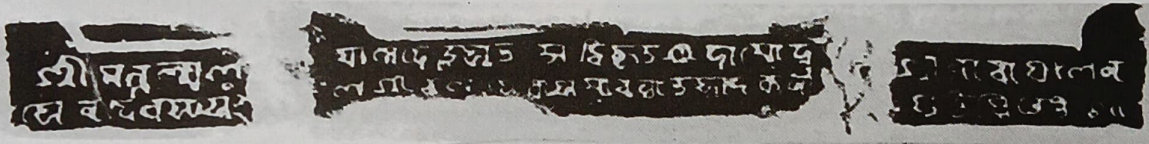


Kṣatriya identity, suggesting an admixture of Brāhmaṇa and Kṣatriya blood (Sircar 1982a: 113-15). Vijayasena ruled for at least 62 years and the early years of his reign were spent warring either with the Pāla kings or their enemies. The Deopara inscription narrates his campaigns in different directions. The kings specifically named are Nānya, Vīra, Rāghava and Vardhana, besides the rulers of Gauḍa, Kāmarūpa and Kalinga. The Gauḍa king was obviously Madanapāla. If Raghava was son of Choḍagaṅga Anantavarman, the separate mention of the king of Kalinga cannot be explicated. Identity of the king of Kāmarūpa is problematic. Nānya was the founder of the Mithila branch of the Karṇāṭa power. The logical identification of Vīra and Vardhana with Vīraguṇa and Dvorapavarddhana of Rāmacarita will again confirm the powerful status of these local polities. The location of his only copperplate signifies that he extended the limits of Puṇḍravardhana till the extreme southern borders of Western Bengal along the east of the Bhagirathi. His son Vallālasena had acquired some parts of southern Bihar as evident from the discovery of the Sanokhar inscription. The legendary classification of his dominion according to *Vallālacarita* into Vaṅga, Varendra, Rāḍha, Baghadi and Mithila has been rejected by Sircar on account of obvious anachronism, but the inclusion of the Baghri region of Murshidabad may not be altogether an interpolated claim, since in one of the inscriptions of his son Lakṣmaṇasena, the donated land was located still in the Vyāghrataṭī [*maṇḍala*].

His son Lakṣmaṇasena has new evidence from Bagbari as already stated, where he is found to have consecrated a tank in Ābhīra *pallī* or the hamlet of the milkmen

and caused the construction of a temple of Viṣṇu, besides recording his victory over the city named Karṇapura and a village called Vakasiya, though I have failed to understand the context of the latter. Equally interesting is the mention of Tira *bhukti* which was a major administrative division in north Bihar under the Pāla rule. The inscription was engraved by Śūlapāṇi, son of the great artist (*śilpi-kalpa-viṭapin*) Bṛhaspati, implying his identification with the officer (*rāṇaka*) of Vijayasena who engraved the Deopara inscription. However, the complete absence of any section dedicated to genealogy of the family is quite curious and surprising.

Lakṣmaṇasena's latest known date is the year twenty-seven found in the Bahwal copperplate. His assumption of the epithet *Gauḍeśvara* has supplementary support from the claim of erecting victory pillar within the Gahadavala dominion at Banares and also at Puri after his victory over Kaliṅga. The claims of his court poet Umāpatidhara on his victory over Prāgjyotiṣa, Kaliṅga, Gauḍa, Kasi, Magadha, Cedi and the Mleccha seems stereotyped, although the last of these was probably not altogether out of substance. That their conflict with the Gahadavala kings was heightened during his father's reign is shown by a copperplate of Gahadavala



Inscription on the Rampal Caṇḍī image of the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena.

Image Source: Journal of Ancient Indian History, vol. XXIV, 2007-2008, page. 93



Jayachandra dated in c. CE 1175 recording land grant around Patna. The use of the Lakṣmaṇasena era of reckoning in private records within the Gahadavala territory and the contiguous Bihar region also lends support to the Sena-Gahadavala struggle in the twelfth century.

Lakṣmaṇasena was survived by Viśvarūpasena, after he fled to eastern Bengal having been succumbed to Islamic invasion of CE 1205 and started issuing settlement records from headquarters in villages such as Dhāryagrāma and Phasphagrāma. Viśvarūpasena issued three copperplates in two of which the name his son Sūryasena is found. He was previously mistaken as Keśavasena due to wrong reading of these plates that showed signs of corrections during the later years of his father's rule. (Sircar 1982b:). The

Left :

Caṇḍī image erected in regnal year 3 of Lakṣmaṇasena, found from Rampal, Dhaka

Image Source: Journal of Ancient Indian History, vol. XXIV, 2007-2008, page. 93

other son Puruṣottamasena has no direct record to his credit. These later Sena rulers continued to control eastern Bengal till the first quarter of the thirteenth century, while their fathers subordinate in southern Bengal named Ḍommanapāla has his only record precisely datable in CE 1196 from southwestern West Bengal.

ADMINISTRATION IN THE PĀLA-SENA ERA

Any discussion on Pāla and Sena administration has to start with the expression *Jayaskandhāvāra* found without any exception in all the land grant charters distributed over West Bengal-Bangladesh as well as Bihar. The copperplate inscriptions of the Pāla kings refer to the existence of as many as thirteen such 'camps of victory' from where the various charters were issued. The meaning of this expression has been explained as 'the royal camp or capital'; epithet of royal camps or residences' (Sircar 1966: 134). The continuously changing names with a few reappearing in irregular intervals indicate that these were shifting establishments. The explanation behind not locating at a fixed base can only be explained in terms of the continuous battles characterizing their polity right from the beginning till the twelfth century. And this was the root behind their formation of solid military machinery involving the employment of a mixed milieu of 'regular and irregular troops of various localities like Gauḍa, Mālava, Khasa, Kulika and Huṇa, besides also sometimes Lāṭa and Karṇāṭa (Ghosh 2006). At an upper level were the *sāmanta*, already discussed in details, who not only served the kings in military raids and occasions of crisis,

but also engaged themselves in regularly patronizing religious establishments.

In the area of civil administration under a complex design based on local and extra-local levels of administrative tiers, the general scheme of orientation from province (*bhukti*) to the village (*grāma*) via the various intermediate tiers (like *viṣaya*, *maṇḍala*, *khaṇḍala* or *vīthi*) the hierarchy of which are often confusing, unlike the Gupta frame of administration which was almost unilateral with elements of reciprocational lower levels (Chattopadhyaya 1990, for a detailed discussion). However, the gradual prominence of certain *maṇḍala* category divisions of administration having essentially toponymic identities or showing floral or faunal characters of the landscape demands a separate focus of study.

The stereotyped list of administrative officers addressed in the copperplates on the occasions of land transfer offers a kaleidoscopic profile of the nature and ramifications of the different administrative departments. Apart from the *rāṇaka* (minister), *dūtaka* (executor of a grant) and the *rājaputra* (prince) who are almost omnipresent in inscriptions, one comes across posts such as *mahākumārāmātya* (chief minister of a province?), *mahāsāndhivigrahika* (minister of defence), *Aṅgarakṣaka* (royal bodyguards), *mahādaṇḍānāyaka* and *dharmādhikāra* (officers of the judiciary), *mahāpratīhāra*, *dāṇḍika*, *daṇḍopāsika* and *daṇḍaśakti* (broader class of officers of the police department), and *rājasthānīya* (the broader class of high official). In the area of territorial administration, the names of *viṣayapati*, *daśagrāmika*, and

ṣaṣṭhādhikṛta are frequently referred to (for a broader discussion, Majumdar 1971: 273-80, Ghosh 2006).

The administrative polity under Sena rule demands a closer examination than they have so far been subjected to. The copperplate inscriptions of the Sena family stand out in more than one significant respect when compared to their preceding or near-contemporary counterparts. A careful scrutiny of the physical constitution of these plates will readily bring home the uniqueness of some of their contents and the patterns of representation of such features. Firstly, for reasons unknown, the composers of the Sena plates traced the genealogy of the ruling king invariably down to the three previous generations and not beyond that in any case. Secondly, the address of the king to the royal officers and other dignitaries includes the *rājñī* (i.e., the queen). Finally, the following three points in the grant portion of these documents are noteworthy: i. these inscriptions attract immediate attention because of their unprecedented precision and contentment about the measurement system of land and the usage of numerous measuring rods for the purpose (Gupta 1996). ii. a section of this set of inscriptions refers to some administrative divisions that either appear for the first time in Bengal inscriptions or convey when interpreted in terms of contemporary perceptions of representing politico administrative locales altogether new and quite significant connotations. iii. in some of the later Sena inscriptions, names of certain *jayaskandhāvāra* (i.e., the administrative headquarters) having *grāma* name-ending appear, for the first time in the

history of the delta and here again, the pattern of representation of the names of these places is essentially exceptional.

If one takes a cursory look at the copperplate inscriptions of the Sena period, out of the twelve charters one each were drafted during the reign of Vijayasena and Vallālasena, seven during the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena and the remaining three in that of his son Viśvarūpasena and his son Sūryyasena. A re-examination of some of the details recorded in the grant portion of the Sena copperplates may be undertaken in order of revealing certain aspects of contemporary local political administration and economy. The appearance of new administrative divisions in Sena records was first noticed by D.C. Ganguly, the editor of the Saktipur copperplate, although he did not try to underline the probable nature of such administrative divisions. As D.C. Ganguly rightly observes (Ganguly 1984)³⁵ :

The inscription furnishes us with the names of some hitherto unknown territorial divisions in Bengal...The relation between *khandala* and *vithi* is not known. The division of *vithi* seems to have been a *khatika*...Between *khatika* and *caturaka* was a unit called *vritta*. *Vritta* was divided into *caturaka*, *caturaka* into *grāma* and *grāma* into *pāṭaka*.

Among all the above-mentioned types of territorial divisions of administration, the three most commonly encountered names found on records belonging to varying geographical *pāṭaka* niches are those of *āvṛtti*, *caturaka* and *pāṭaka*, although the last one was not unprecedented in Bengal inscriptions, but assumed an altogether different

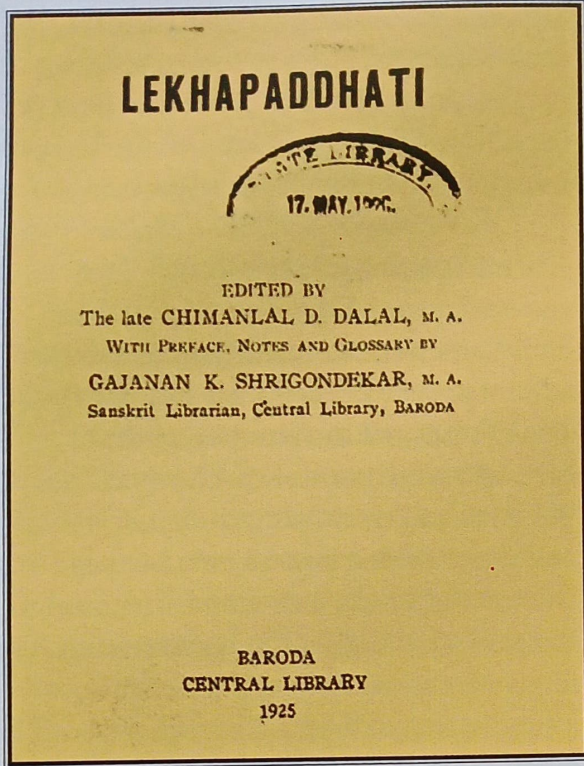
connotation in later Sena charters of land transfer. Let us start with *āvr̥tti*. Altogether three *āvr̥tti* are known from Sena inscriptions. Arranged in their chronological order of occurrence, these are: the Kantallapura *āvr̥tti* of the Varendra tract in the Paṇḍravardhana *bhukti* mentioned in the Madhainagar plate, the Bandana *āvr̥tti* forming directly a part of the Paṇḍravardhana *bhukti* mentioned in the Rajabadi plate and the Madhukṣīraka *āvr̥tti* within the same *bhukti* recorded in the Madhyapada plate.

³⁶ Available literature dealing in the administrative history of Bengal in the early medieval period has taken *āvr̥tti* as an administrative *unit* (emphasis added) like a Pargana (Sircar 1965a: 380, 1966: 41) or simply sub-divisions of a kingdom, (Chowdhary 1971: 373), though no satisfactory explanation of such a comparative derivation has been offered. Unfortunately, the inscriptions are simply silent about the nature and characters of them. Then what could have been the nature of a *āvr̥tti* level centre of administration? A somewhat logical clue is provided in a work of lexicography called *Amarakoṣa*. The text refers, in the section on adjectives, to the term *āvr̥ta* as essentially a general place-name and further suggests that an *āvr̥ta* should be morphologically described as an area covered (or secured) with a moat or ditches (Bhattacharya 2001: 313). The only logical inference one can draw though tentatively and at the risk of taking the term in its physical sense is that an *āvr̥tti* (undoubtedly in an extended sense of the term *āvr̥ta*) was plausibly a fortified (or moat protected) nucleus/core settlement area of a larger administrative division labeled with the same name. Out of the three *āvr̥tti*

category administrative centres of the Sena dominion, one was located within the geo-political boundary of Varendra in Paṇḍravardhana province, while the rest were located in the Vaṅga region.

Some of the *āvr̥tti* mentioned above incorporated within their spatial limits, another newly introduced politico-administrative centre called *caturaka*. The Vasuśrī and the Navasaṁgraha *caturaka* were parts respectively of the Bandana and the Madhukṣīraka *āvr̥tti* and were located presumably between Sabhar and Dhaka-Bikrampur regions in Bangladesh.³⁷ This statement does not imply that a *caturaka* was exclusively a subdivision of *āvr̥tti*. There are many as five more instances in the Sena copperplates where a *caturaka* is found to form a part of some other category of administrative centre; a different dimension of this fact will concern us later. Thus, the Vetadda, Kantallapura, Kumarapura, Lauhanda, and the Ura *caturaka* were not only located in different geographical sectors, but were also not part of any *āvr̥tti*.

Discussions on *caturaka* by some of the ranking authorities have been more than that on *āvr̥tti*. A number of suggestions on the character of this administrative division in Bengal are available in the extant literature. Depending on its occurrence in a Deccanese compendium of the medieval period named *Lekhapaddhati*, a group of scholars took it as a police station or tax for the maintenance of a police station.³⁸ A second group of scholars intended to derive the term from the composition of four, depending on the root word *chatuh* (i.e., four) from which



Left :

Title page of printed edition of Lekhapaddhati

the term originates.³⁹ While both of these suggestions are partially correct, a more intensive study of the etymology and the spatial distribution of *caturaka* will lead one to reveal some crucially significant attributes of this geographical-administrative centre.

It can be reasonably ascertained from a study of etymology of the term that *caturaka* possessed a dual identity as an administrative centre. Initially emanating out of the root four, the term in its extended sense meant the nucleus of a larger spatial entity connected with the provision of security to its residents. Secondly, such *caturaka* also acted as tax collectorates (attention may be drawn here to the name Navasaṁgraha *caturaka*, lit. 'new collectorate' of the Madhyapada plate). In order of underlining the genesis of functional characters of the *caturakas*, the most crucial clue seems to be hidden in the pattern of their geographical distribution. Firstly, even a casual review

of their spatial distribution clearly reveals that each of them was located on or along the actual coastal uplands of deltaic Bengal, where landscape is dominated by the sweeping deposition of secondary alluvium. Govindapur, Bakultala and Saktipur plates record donation of lands both to the east and the west of the river Bhagirathi; the Rajabadi/Bhawal plate refers to land grant in areas around the confluence of the Padma and the Yamuna rivers; all the three *caturaka* mentioned in the Madhyapada plate may be located around the Vikramapura *bhāga* ('section') of Vaṅga. Secondly, this administrative centre is located at consistently shifting levels in the general ladder of administration, suggesting changes in the spatial limits of this tier at different regional and subregional levels. Finally, one of the interesting accounts on the character of landholding elite sat *caturaka* level is delineated in the Bakultala plate of the time of Lakṣmaṇasena. It refers to the creation of a plot of *agrahāra* for a *śāntyāgārika* category of official in the Maṇḍala *grāma* within the Kantallapura *caturaka* and further refers, in relation to the specification of boundaries of the granted land, to the preexisting four *agrahāra* settlements held by four other *śāntyāgārika* officers (Sanyal 2005).

The third tier of regional administration that finds place in some of the later Sena inscriptions is *pāṭaka*. The earliest epigraphic reference to the word as part of a village settlement appears in the Damodarpur copperplate of Gupta year 224 (CE 543-44), which records transfer of 2 *kulyavāpa* of land in three localities of which one was Svachchanda-pāṭaka, the two others having been Arddhati and Lavaṅgasikā. Now, if one takes the term

praveśya in the phrase *svacchandapāṭake-arddhatipraveśyala vaṅgasikāyāñ ca*, to refer, following D.C. Sircar, to the revenue assessment of a village with another (Sircar 1966: 263), it may be taken to imply that *Svacchanda-pāṭaka* did not form a village per se and this was possibly the precise reason behind the commission of joint revenue assessment for two rural localities spatially smaller than a *grāma*, by the authorities of the *Koṭivarṣa viṣaya*. Sircar's suggestion following Keilhorn, in that case, that a *pāṭaka* was actually the outlying portions of a village...which had a name of its own, but really belonged to a larger village (Sircar 1966: 242), seems quite reasonable and justified. *Pāṭaka*, in the above sense of the term, continued to exist in parts of eastern and western Bengal throughout the sixth-seventh centuries. But it is quite curious to note that the practice of using *pāṭaka* as a specific unit of land measurement, having varying denominations with changes in time and space, also continued simultaneously.⁴⁰ However, it is very difficult at the present state of information to underline the exact relationship between *pāṭaka* as a rural settlement locate and that as a specific measure of land, particularly because there are epigraphic evidences to the reference of *pāṭaka* having both the connotations within the limits of a specific geographical area at a given point of time.

Precisely from the second half of the seventh century *pāṭaka* as a rural settlement unit smaller than *grāma* ceased to exist in epigraphic records, the last known example being the Ashrafpur copperplate of Devakhaḍga datable to c. CE 670-71 where *Tāla pāṭaka*, Markatasi

pāṭaka and *Dāra pāṭaka* are mentioned as parts of the granted land⁴¹ to reappear after more than five hundred years in the Saktipur copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, where *Rāghavahatṭa*, *Varāhakoṇa*, *Vallihita*, *Vijaharupura*, *Damaravada* and *Nima pāṭaka* of the *Kumārapura caturaka* are said to have been granted in the *Uttara Rāḍha* territory. Three other inscriptions record the donation of *pāṭaka*. These are: the *Madhainagar* plate that mentions *Dapaniya pāṭaka* having as its southern and western boundaries two other *pāṭaka* named *Cadaspaśa* and *Guṇḍisthira*, in the direction of *Kantapura āvṛtti*, the *Idilpur* plate recording grant of land in the *Tālapada pāṭaka* in *Vaṅga* and the *Madhyapada* plate where one comes across the existence of *Rāmasiddhi*, *Ajikula* and *Ghāgharakatṭi pāṭaka*, all possibly located within the periphery of the *Navya* sector of *Vaṅga*. It is interesting to note that by the time these inscriptions were drafted, early medieval texts of lexicography had already precisely defined a *pāṭaka* in spatial terms.

Thus, the *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* of Hemacandra prescribes, in connection with the spatial features of a *grāma*, that a *pāṭaka* is *paṭas tu tadarddhe syāt*, i.e., half of a village (Chowdhary 1971: 48, 80). Therefore, it can be fairly surmised that unlike *pāṭaka* of sixth seventh century, which necessarily formed a hamlet or an outlying territory of a larger village, the *pāṭaka* recorded in the Sena inscriptions were gradually being recognized as prominent and independent rural settlement units replacing, in select areas, *grāma* that formed so far, the smallest territorial unit in the general hierarchy of administration. Possibly incompatibility to this new connotation

of a *pāṭaka*, a whole new and complicated system of land measurement involving various denominations of smaller units was evolved by the Sena rulers in areas where the existence of *pāṭaka* as a settlement unit was in vogue. The final manifestation of this development can possibly be viewed in the Bhatara copperplate of Govinda-Keśavadeva that refers to Bhaṭṭa *pāṭaka* as an independent settlement locality of Śrīhaṭṭa, where 375 hala of land was donated; this Bhatta *pāṭaka* is unquestionably identifiable with modern Bhattapara, still a major settlement locality in Sylhet. Some of the *pāṭaka* freshly emerging in the Sena inscriptions deserve special attention, as their names would demand. Such a name as Rāmasiddhi *pāṭaka*, implying evidently a personal name-prefix, might suggest that the person after whom the *pāṭaka* was named must have been a man of prominence in the concerned locality. Further, the name Rāghavaḥṭṭa *pāṭaka* (*haṭṭa* meaning a market) located in close proximity to five other *pāṭaka* one of which is specified as a *pura* (viz. Vijaharupura), is obviously indicative of the fact that this *pāṭaka* category settlement had a domineering role to play in the development of local commercial set up within the Madhugiri *maṇḍala*. These occurrences are admittedly inconsistent patterns, but when and where they are found to exist, their impact on the neighbouring rural settlement structure is undeniable. Apart from the interesting accounts on some so far less discussed names of administrative and geo-political divisions, a second category of evidence from the same grant portion of all the later Sena inscriptions may be highlighted through a review of the pattern in which

the administrative headquarter or the more commonly known camp of victory (*jayaskandhāvāra*) is represented in epigraphic sources. From the time of the Pāla rule onwards the names of royal administrative headquarters, officially responsible for the issuance of legal documents, are represented in the grant portion of the copperplates in the form of a conventional sentence that starts with phrase *Iha/Sa khalu*, followed by the name of the concerned headquarter (which is invariably a *pura* or a *nagara*), again succeeded by the phrase *samāvāsita śrīmajjayaskandhāvārāt*. The only exception to this is found in the three so far discovered copperplates of the Pāla monarch Madanapāla, issued from the *jayaskandhāvāra* located at Ramavati and hailing from Manahali and Rajibpur. I shall return to the exact point of exception later.

All the early copperplate inscriptions of the Sena rulers chronologically ranging between the Barrackpur plate of Vijayasena's sixty second year and the Saktipur plate of Lakṣmaṇasena's sixth year were issued from their office at Vikramapura; the *jayaskandhāvāra* in all these inscriptions is, as usual, represented through the stereotypical sentence noted earlier. But it is quite intriguing to notice that in four out of the five Sena copperplates datable to the first quarter of the thirteenth century, a crucially significant variation in the pattern of representation of the *jayaskandhāvāra* is found, although apparently, they seem to belong to the larger homogeneous group of Sena epigraphs. Thus, a review of the sentence in the Madhainagar, Rajabadi, Idilpur and the Madanpada plates referring to the *jayaskandhāvāra* bears

the following morphology: *Iha/Sa khalu phasphagrāma/dhāryyagrāma-parisara-samāvāsita-śrīmajjayaskandhāvārāt*. One can readily bring home two points from the above citation: firstly, instead of earlier *pura* or *nagara* types, the administrative headquarters mentioned in all of these inscriptions are *grāma*; secondly, the names of royal offices in these plates are invariably suffixed with the unusual expression *parisara*. It is evident, from the regular appearance of the term in a particular set of records within a given time span, that its reference was neither normative nor arbitrary. The phrase in question has been translated as here from the camps of victory situated in Phasphagrāma/Dhāryyagrāma. The apparently conventional sentence that contains this term if one contextualizes the word with the manner of its expression may be better translated as here from the camps of victory situated *within the confined limits of* Phasphagrāma/Dhāryyagrāma.⁴² The question that immediately strikes attention is obviously related to the contention behind such an unusual specification in the representation of the administrative headquarters. In order of having a justifiable answer, one may now recall the exceptional representation of the *jayaskandhāvāra* in the copperplates of Madanapāla. Apart from the Sena inscriptions referred to above, the landgrant charters of this last paramount Pāla king are the only epigraphic documents of early medieval Bengal that referred to the capital as *parisara-samāvāsita*. These are also the only known Pāla inscriptions issued from the well-known city of Rāmāvatī. If one takes a look at the description of the city during the reign of Rāmapāla, as gauged from the

Rāmacarita of Sandhyākaranandin, the narrative is clearly that of a flourishing urban centre.⁴³ But since we do not have a single copperplate inscription of this ruler so far known, it is difficult to speculate about its status as a camp of victory in the eleventh century. And when it finally figures in the inscriptional corpus around the middle of the twelfth century, it is precisely and repeatedly described as an essentially enclosed place.

In the first place, it is fascinating to notice that the largest concentration of these regional and sub-regional centres of political administration like *āvṛttis* and *caturakas* is found in the Nāvya (*lit.* 'navigable') sector of Vaṅga and the Khāḍi areas contiguous to the estuarine mouth of the Bay of Bengal. Thus, they were mostly located in regions that formed a potential buffer zone in the context of wider Indian Ocean exchange networks along the littoral areas, evidently through the Samataṭa based linkages of trade.⁴⁴ Besides, sporadic concentration of such territorial divisions is also occasionally found in the central Bhagirathi delta having sweeping distribution of older alluvium deposits fit for expansion of sedentary agrarian settlements. It is interesting to note that altogether eight *agrahāra* plots in two presumably contiguous sets within the spatial orbits of four *caturakas* in the Khadi and the Navya territories, find mention in the Bakultala and the Madhyapada plates. Now, the composite land mass around such hydrographically and geologically dynamic spaces (*viz.* Nāvya and Khāḍi) is highly suitable for the expansion of agrarian settlements.⁴⁵

Therefore, increasing concentration

of newly created rent-free settlements in these active alluvial plains must have had a close bearing on the broader rural agrarian set up of the coastal uplands. Further, it has been suggested quite rightly that such concentrations as reflected in the case of the Bakultala plate are indicative though not in any spatio-temporally uniform manner of certain interactive relationships between the secular land holders at the village level and the *agrahāra* holding religious elements at the immediately superior (i.e., *caturaka*) level (Chattopadhyaya 1990: 36-7). Secondly, gradual prominence of certain *pāṭaka* as administrative divisions in select geographical terrains more suitable for spread of agriculture and consolidation of economic affairs through trade linkage so sometimes having close bearing on the rural settlement structures or on organization of local economy (as evident from names like Ramasiddhi *pāṭaka* and Rāghavaḥṭṭa *pāṭaka*) obviously reflects an intense trend in regional and sub-regional geo-political growth. This development of *pāṭaka* as a settlement locale vis-a-vis revenue unit spatially distinguishable from a *grāma* was in compatibility to a highly advanced and intricate system of land measurement and revenue assessment in which several newer and smaller units of measurement *bhu-khadi*, *khātika*, *kakini*, and *udana* (i.e., *unmana*) were freshly implemented in areas where such geopolitical growths can be effectively implemented.

Furthermore, spatial distribution of these geopolitical centres of local administration would reveal that they were created in some deliberately chosen geographical niches either highly fertile for agriculture and sedentary growth or

essentially vibrant in the context of local and extra-local levels of trading linkages. Thus, it will be difficult to visualize these geo-political centres as omni present units like *viṣaya* and *maṇḍala*; rather they acted as sub-regional organizations, inter alia, of economic and political administration in select geo-hydrographic terrains of early mediaeval Bengal. It is again interesting to notice that such a purposefully geared regionalization in the geopolity was getting strengthened in a period that had just witnessed the attacks in and subsequent loss of the northern parts of the Sena dominion under the Islamic powers in CE 1205, as already suggested. Possibly such regional and local political-administrative and economic developments coupled with a complex and efficient machinery for revenue administration in the eastern segment that became the centre of Sena polity in the first quarter of the thirteenth century had contributed to the fact that this ruling family continued to survive for more than two decades in spite of the sudden and powerful thrust from alien groups.

Finally, it is quite crucially significant to find that at the later years of both Pāla and the Sena dominions their administrative headquarters are described in their legal documents in a completely different and unusual manner. Deliberate use of the term *parisara* in expressing the physical character of the offices, which were essentially villages during the later Senas rule, is possibly indicative of a conscious proclamation of the local administrative authorities, as one finds an identical precedence in the later years of Pāla rule in north Bengal, that the most important

Below:
Inscription of Gov-
indachandra, King of
Vanga

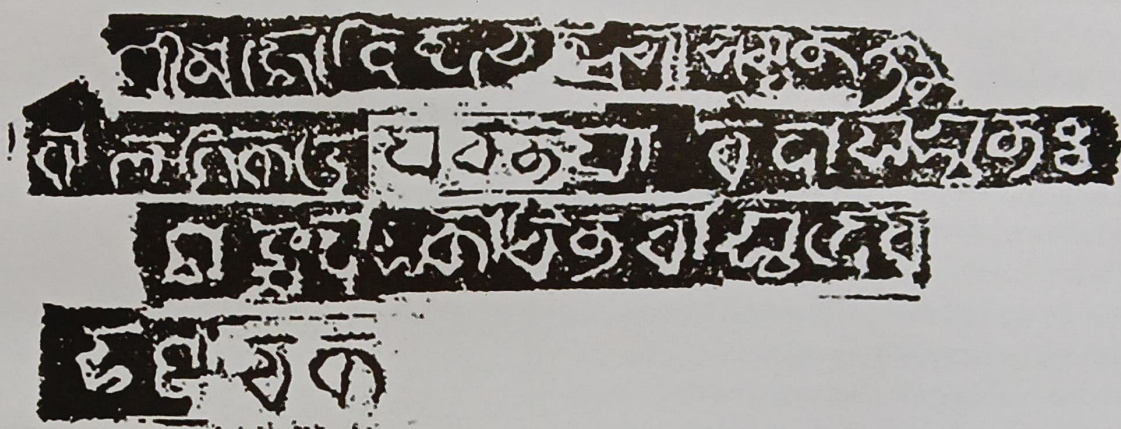
Image source- Epi-
graphia Indica, vol.
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administrative offices responsible for the final endorsement and issuance of legal records are still located with a confined area under the direct intervention of the central political authorities.

CONTEMPORARY LOCAL LINEAGES: POLITIES BEYOND THE PĀLA-SENA ORBIT

Apart from the two principal dynastic

Kalyāṇacandra, Laḍahacandra and Govindacandra, who ruled from the the early tenth to the mid eleventh century in unilineal succession. The family was initially Buddhist in affiliation while Laḍahachandra was a Vaiṣṇava. While their political relations with the Pāla have been discussed, it will be relevant to reiterate the record that though their original base was at Vikramapura,



frames that formed the principal subject of inquiry of this discussion, a number of other independent local lineages figured in the broader political atlas of early medieval Bengal contemporary to the Pāla and the Sena. The most prominent and politically sustained existence was that of the Candra dynasty whose origin is unknown except for an interpolated statement by Tāranātha that one Lalitachandra ruled in Bhaṅgāla before the rise of the Pāla dynasty information that can prove nothing on their origin. The genealogy preserved in the copperplates of rulers having unimpeachable historicity draws their descent from one Puṇḍracandra followed by Suvarṇacandra and Trailokyacandra. The historical lineage starts with Śrīcandra followed by his descendants

Śrīcandra during his half-century rule made his strong presence felt in the southeastern borders. Two inscriptions of the time of Śrīcandra have recently been published, but no new information is contained in them.

The line developed by Kuṇḍjaraghātavarṣa probably died out without any following, while a second Kamboja line is known from epigraphic records of southwestern Bengal. This second line had its base at a place called Priyaṅgu in Odisha. Two inscriptions from Irda and Kalanda of the time of Nayapāla in the eleventh century are known and they record donation within Daṇḍabhukti, but it had by then lost its provincial identity and got transformed into a *maṇḍala*.

A number of local lineages across the geopolitical units of Vaṅga and Samatāṭa ruled in the concerned period. The Varman family staing with Harivarman via his brother Sāmalavarman to Bhojavarman ruled for century in the eleventh-twelfth centuries. The original progenitor Vajravarman and his successor Jātavarman have no records. An inscription of a minister of Harivarman named Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva was found from Odisha, though its original locale was probably the Dhaka region (Sircar 1983:105-11). The statement that Bhavadeva's grandfather was a minister of *Vaṅgeśvara* will necessitate the inclusion of the the preecessors in the list of historical kings of the lineage. A second Deva family of Samatāṭa-Harikela regions having a number of branches ruled between the late eleventh and the mid twelfth centuries. Inscriptional evidences of a number of these kings of this lineage like Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikeladeva, Dāmodaradeva, Vīradharadeva, Daśarathadeva, Govinda-Keśavadeva and Īśānadeva are known. That this lineage could retain its political identity long after the decline of the Sena polity is reflected in the precise dates available in their records. The many subordinate lineages in southern Bihar have already been taken notice of.

The brief outline of a chronologically wider horizon covering nearly a millennium will demand one final observation. The Pāla ruled for more that four hundred year radiating enormous influence on the norethern Indian polity as the principal power of Bengal. All the rulers starting from Dharmapāla to Madanapāla enjoyed the epithet



Gauḍeśvara in its connotation per se, but the sources so far revisited have shown amply that at not a single point of their entire political existence, they were able to bring the entire delta under one umbrella. A broad review of the spatial distribution of the Sena inscriptions shows arrange, on the other hand, from Sundarban in the south to Madhainagar in the north and from Bhawal in the east to Paikore in the west, even after keeping aside the Sanokhar inscription of Vallālasena discovered from Bhagalpur in Bihar. This is a geographical stretch of eastern India that not a single Pāla king has ever claimed to have held sway over in the entire span of their political career. [Courtesy: Sanyal, Rajat. 2014. The Pala-Sena and Others. In D.K. Chakrabarti and Makkhan Lal (eds.) *Political History and Administration (c. AD 750-1300)*, Vol. V. New Delhi: Aryan Books International]

Top:
Inscription of Govindachandra, King of Vanga and Kulkudi
Sun-God image
inscription

Notes

1 Since the provenance of the plate, located about 30km northwest of present Comilla town, itself was an ancient agrahara (Gunikagrahara, i.e., modern Gunaighar), it can be safely surmised that this Vainyagupta exercised some political dominance in southeastern Bengal. And such a direct line of political control is not altogether unlikely as the territory of Samatata formed one of the frontier principalities of his predecessor Samudragupta as recorded in the Allahabad eulogy, although one can hardly be certain about the date of annexation of this sector by Vainyagupta (Sircar 1985b: 105).³ It may be relevant here to note that a recent interpretation of the term *padanudhyata* in the light of exhaustive epigraphic and literary sources shows that it was more an honorific than an indicator of subordination, at least before the tenth century, when it came to be used, though not sweepingly, in its physical sense meaning meditating on the feet of implying a hierarchy of relationship between polities of different levels (Ferrier and Törzsök 2008).

2 It may be relevant here to note that a recent interpretation of the term *padanudhyata* in the light of exhaustive epigraphic and literary sources shows that it was more an honorific than an indicator of subordination, at least before the tenth century, when it came to be used, though not sweepingly, in its physical sense meaning meditating on the feet of implying a hierarchy of relationship between polities of different levels (Ferrier and Törzsök 2008).

3 D.C. Sircar was aware of only the last three rulers and allotted 65 years from AD 535 to 600 for the group (Sircar 1985b: 112). If Dvadasaditya is included as the first member of the group succeeded by Dharmaditya, Gopachandra and Samacharadeva, there is a distinct possibility of this chronological bracket being dragged roughly a decade back. Further, the discovery of the plate of Dvadasaditya has now proved that he was a separate ruler of the Kotalipara group and not identifiable with Maharajadhiraja Vainyagupta Dvadasaditya of coins (Islam 2011).

4 Sircar's suggestion that the use of ruling year instead of the more easily recognizable Gupta era in Gopachandra's records suggests that he was a rebel samanta of the royal Gupta lineage in Bengal is equally curious and unconvincing (Sircar 1985b: 109). The Sailodbhava king Madhavavarman II was a feudatory of Sasanka quite sometime after the end of Gupta rule in eastern India and yet he is found to have used the Gupta reckoning in his well-known Ganjam copperplate (cf. Hultzsch 1981a).

5 The decipherer of the inscriptions reports that out of the three copperplates, two were engraved and the third was a blank with a seal bearing the name of the king, evidently, kept ready for a future donation; of the two engraved charters, one is badly corroded and beyond decipherment (Islam 2012: 61).

6 Sircar read in the photo of one of these inscriptions the name of Rajaputra Balabhata having the epithet *paramamahesvara mata-pitrpadanudhyatarajaputra*, implying that Balabhata was a Saiva (Sircar op. cit. 148). One may note in this connection that the seal of the first Ashrafpur plate depicts the figure of a bull instead of the usual *dharmachakra* emblem of Buddhist rulers, although Rajaraja was a Buddhist.

7 The recent publication of a number of gold and silver issues of two kings named Prithubhata and Sarvanada has led Shariful Islam to incorporate these kings in the genealogy of the Khadga lineage, but the chronological status of these kings remains unknown (Islam 2008).

8 B.N. Mukherjee has identified the early medieval Harikela/Harikela in the light of exhaustive epigraphic and numismatic evidences with the present Chittagong tracts of Bangladesh (Mukherjee 1975).

9 Bhattacharya records that (Bhattacharya 2000: 473) The Chittagong area over which he ruled is described as Khasha-maka [maka perhaps meaning dominion] and his officers are described as aśeṣakhasa-makādhikaraṇa. This is perhaps the earliest epigraphist reference to the Khashas from eastern India...The Bhagavatapurana, 2.4.18 refers to the Khasas [sic] along with the Kiratas, Hunas, Andhras, Pulindas, Pukkasas, Ābhīras, Suhmas and Yavanas who are called pāpas, sinners, and who were purified by embracing Vaiṣṇavism. Our ruler, Devatideva was a Khasha king of the Chittagong area (ancient Harikela) who was a Buddhist and not a Vaiṣṇava. D.C. Sircar recovered from epigraphic and literary references that the original territory of the Khasa tribe was apparently the Kumaun-Garhwal region (Sircar 1972-73: 50-1).

10 D.C. Sircar's estimate of Śaśāṅka's eastern dominion extending even into the Vaṅga and Samatāṭa sectors of eastern and southeastern Bengal, however, seems overemphasized (Sircar 1972-73: 116).

11 The name and location of the provenance of this copperplate and many others in Bengal have been matters of debate and confusion. It has recently been recovered that the village Mallia reported by Lionel D. Barnett was actually Maliadanga in the Sagardighi Police Station of the Murshidabad district and the grant took place in areas along the border of this district with Birbhum to its west. The exercise of recovery of provenances of copperplate inscriptions from West Bengal has shown that proper location of find-spots and ancient settlements may provide a sound plank for the archaeological study of early medieval settlements (Sanyal 2010a).

12 One has to note here that the comparative chronologies of the Maukhari, Later Gupta and Gauḍa kings is an issue of considerable confusion. D.C. Sircar's suggestion that Grahavarman, Śaśāṅka and Devagupta were contemporaries, when he himself places Devagupta at the end of the seventh century as a successor of Adityasena, suffers from obvious self-contradiction. There is no doubt from the mention of this king in Banas composition and Harsas inscriptions as the Malava king defeated by Rajyavardhana, elder brother of Śaśāṅka, this Devagupta has to have been a near contemporary (or more precisely a predecessor) of Kumaragupta II of Malwa (c. AD 600-30), son and successor of Mahasenagupta (Thapliyal 1985: 42, Agarwal 2003; cf. Sircar 1985b: 192-3).

13 D.C. Sircar referred to this inscription rightly summarizing its contents, though it is not known if his reading was published in the Bangladesh Lalitkala as Sircar's list of forthcoming publication bearing a citation under A Matha of the Vaishnava Parivrajakasī indicates; there is no reference to this piece in Bhattacharyas publication. Sircar's summary reads (Sircar 1982a: 45): We come to know from an inscription discovered from Pabna in north Bengal that Panchahuti was the lord of Bhattala mandala. Karkkaraja born in his lineage was the hero of Bhattala desa and was an associate/friend of Yaśovarman His grandson Pāhila who served the kingdom by DevaPāla. Gouriswar Bhattacharya demands that the inscription proves that Yaśovarman was in occupation of northern Bengal for at least some time where Pāhila donated a cloister (matha) to the Vaiṣṇava saints more than a century later (Bhattacharya 2000: 182-3).

14 Susan L. Huntington has tried to assign an image of seated Buddha from Bihar to the reign of Vigrahapāla I based on her analysis of the stylistic features of the piece.

- 15 Sircar later revised his chronology after the discovery of the inscribed image of year 12 of Śūrapāla I (Sircar 1982a: 174-5) and another image of year 37 of Rājyapāla II (Sircar 1985b: 177-9). Thus, the final version of his chronology is yet to be published.
- 16 The name Trilocanapāla (in the place of Tribhuvanapāla) appearing in Huntingtons table is certainly a misprint.
- 17 This is an inscription where the statements of the imprecatory verses are illustrated as a sculptured composition at the bottom of the slab containing the inscription. Only a few examples of this type of epigraphic documents are known from central India as the first decipherer of the epigraph demands and in Bengal this is the sole specimen of its kind.
- 18 The date of accession of Dharmapāla given in Bhattacharyas publication as c. AD 765 is obviously a misprint as otherwise this suggests that he ruled conjointly with his father for the first one decade of his rule a custom never known in any period of Bengals early history.
- 19 A physical examination of the piece clearly reveals that the digit in the unit place is 2 and not 3.
- 20 However, D.C. Sircar reports that a Tibetan king named Mu-tig Btsan-po claims to have defeated Dharmapāla between c. AD 804 and 815 (Sircar 1982a: 62), though in the absence of any reliable corroborative evidence this is difficult to believe in.
- 21 Dilip K. Chakrabarti differs from Sircar regarding the identity of the Yadu territory which he thinks need not suggest Gujarat; some parts of Punjab or Mathura are a better probability (Chakrabarti 2010:98).
- 22 A Jain text called Harivamsa composed in Gujarat in the late eighth century suggested that this country was bounded by Avantī (western Malwa) to the east and the kingdom of Indrāyudha to the north. A second reference is available in a passage of Rajasekharas Karpuramanjari that reads Sagaradatta went to Kānyakubja, the capital of the illustrious Vajrayudha, king of Pañcala. These statements have been taken by Sircar to argue that if the Ayudha kingdom had not extended considerably to the west of Kanauj to incorporate the contiguous territories of Rajasthan and Panjab, the reference to this kingdom with other mighty monarchs of the time cannot be justified.
- 23 It has already been argued elsewhere that (Sanyal 2009a: 313): the Siyan stone inscription of Nayapāla refers to the construction of a vadabhi for the goddess Carccika by a king named Mahendrapāla (Sircar 1982a: 48). It will be pointless now to criticize Sircar for identifying this Mahendrapāla with probably the Gurjara-Pratihara monarch of that name, quite in keeping with the historiography based on the then known sources related to the Pāla-GP struggle. One question that never received attention by either Sircar or other scholars, however, is why a Praśasti type of inscription of a Pāla king would eulogize the royal patronage of a rival Pratihara monarch towards the construction of temples simultaneously with many other Pāla rulers?"
- 24 The Bargaon plate of Ratnapāla claims that this king defeated the contemporary Gaudendra without any specific reference to his name (Sharma 1978: 157, 163). Nayanjot Lahiri rightly identifies his Gauḍa king

with either Mahīpāla I or his son Nayapāla (Lahiri 1991: 83). The Gachthal plate of Gopālavarman makes a more clear statement by referring to the victory of Ratnapāla precisely against Gauḍaraja Rājapāla (Sharma 1978: 214,218). But the identification of this Rājapāla has been a subject of controversy. Ratnapāla is dated between c. AD 1010 and 1050 by Hoernle (Hoernle 1898). D.C. Sircar seems to have accepted the statements made in the Gachthal inscription (Sircar 1982a: 77). But since Rājapāla II, son of Nārāyaṇapāla, is dated in the first half of the ninth century, P.C. Choudhury (who places Ratnapāla between c. AD 1010 and 1040) found it convenient to identify this Rājapāla with the Kamboja king of Priyaṅgu, predecessor of Nayapāla, ruling in the southwestern part of the delta. More recently Dimbeswar Sarma has reconsidered the chronology of the Pāla lineage of Assam and rightly argued that Ratnapāla should be dated between c. AD 930 and 980 since his son IndraPāla was a contemporary of Trailokyachandra ruling in eastern Bengal from c. AD 975 to 1000. But he has unfortunately equated Rājapāla II of the Pāla family with his namesake of the Priyangu seat (Sarma 2003: 103-9). While his review of the chronology of Ratnapāla is quite justifiable, the absurdity of his contention in equating Rājapāla of two different polities demands no explication. Suchandra Ghosh has categorically and rightly located the defeat of Rājapāla II of the Pāla dynasty by Ratnapāla in the broader atlas of Bengal-Assam power struggle in the early medieval period (Ghosh 2011b).

25 Mahīpāla I could not have annexed the southwestern delta taking advantage of the Cola invasion because firstly there is no evidence for such an event and secondly, the assumption will imply that the Pāla king had enough time to subdue the territory in the interval provided by Rājendra's strikes in Vaṅgāla and northern Rāḍha, the latter shaking Mahīpāla I himself along with his subordinate Sangu. Thus, Sircar's argument seems unreasonable.

26 Shastri further equates this Pāla king with the Mahīpāla of the drama *Caṇḍakauśika* composed by Kṣemīsvara in the twelfth century (Shastri 1935-36). However, this assumption has been rightly rejected by Sircar on the ground that the *Karṇāṭa* referred to in this composition must have been the RK and in that case the Mahīpāla of *Caṇḍakauśika* must have been the GP king of that name.

27 These are the 1. Gaya Krishnadwarika temple inscription of year fifteen (Chakravarti 1900, Maitra 2004: 110-20, Sircar 1967b); 2. Gaya Narasimha temple inscription of the same year (Banerji 1915:78); 3. Gaya Gadadhar temple inscription (Banerji op. cit., Sircar op. cit.); 4. Siyan inscription (Sircar 1982b: 102-22) and 5. Bangarh inscription of Murtīśaiva (Sircar 1982b: 85-101).

28 Both the Bhera-Ghat and the Rewah stone inscriptions offer reliable demands on Karnas victory over Bengal (Keilhorn 1894b, Mirashi 1942).

29 D.C. Sircar did not, however, accept S.K. Saraswati's arguments and suggested that considering the rule of Mahīpāla I in AD 1026 and the coronation of Madanapāla in 1143, it is a lesser probability to think of Mahīpāla's reign for five years (Sircar 1982b: 87).

30 The names of these rulers in the text of *Sandhyakara* appears in the following manner (Sastri 1969: 37): He (Rāmapāla) was competent to conquer the earth, having been joined by those (warriors) having large armies, viz. Vandya (Bhīmayasas), Guna (Viraguna), Simha (Jaasimha), Vikrama (Vikramaraja), Sura (Laksmisura, as also Śūrapāla), Sikhara (Rudrasikhara), Bhaskara (Mayagalasimha) and Pratapa (Pratapsimha)...Rāmapāla, who enhanced the prosperity of Arjuna (Narasimharjuna, as also Chandarjuna) and

Vijaya (Vijayaraja) coming to him (as allies), who solicited the help of Vardhana (Dvorapavardhana), and who had (other) associates (samantas) headed by Soma, depended on the support of the strong arms of his obedient cousins, viz. the sons of his maternal uncle (Mahana).

31 Extensive architectural activities in brick found during my exploration of both the areas around Garh Mandaran and Dumni clearly show that there was steady growth of settlements in the eleventh twelfth century horizon in these regions. Detailed archaeological studies of these areas are expected to throw welcome light on the pattern of early medieval settlements in the region.

32 It is certain that the statements made in the text called Kalingattu Parani was a flight of panegyry, as Sircar also categorically suggests (Sircar 1982a:91). However, repeated raid of Kulottuṅgacola in Kalinga is a historical reality.

33 The inclusion of these rulers will also imply that the king Bhīmapāla referred to in the text Śab-dapradīpa was a member of the Pāla dynasty, in as much as his chronological closeness to Rāmapāla is quite apparent from the context in which he is mentioned in the text (Sircar 1982a:91). Therefore, such statements demand sound corroborative evidence.

34 Richard Salomon cautions that a single instance of a portable instance found outside the known limits of a ruler's realm should not be automatically accepted as evidence of his vast conquests, but a consistent pattern of this may be historically (Salomon 1998: 229).

35 The observation of D.C. Ganguly is also echoed by Niharrajan Ray who remarks on the administrative system during the Sena rule that (Ray 1994: 285) in at least one case the division between maṇḍala was the khaṇḍala; elsewhere the vīthi followed the maṇḍala. In one case we see that after the maṇḍala there was the chaturaka, which elsewhere was a division of an āvṛtti, but we cannot ascertain of what an āvṛtti was a division, although it is not entirely unlikely that it was a subdivision of a maṇḍala.

36 It may be noted here that the only Pāla inscription that records the existence of an āvṛtti is the Rajibpur plate of year 2 of Madanapāla that locates the village Budhavada in the Srīgatika āvṛtti of the Koṭivarṣa viṣaya (Mukherjee, 1990-91).

37 Ranabir Chakravarti has shown that from the mid tenth century the Navya and the Yola territories of early mediaeval Vaṅga played a major role in the context of Indian Ocean trading networks along the eastern littorals (Chakravarti 1996). Now, if the port of Vaṅgasāgara-sambhāṇḍāriyaka was located within the orbit of the Yola maṇḍala and the Vasuśrī and Navasaṁgraha caturaka formed part of Navya (that also formed earlier a maṇḍala under the Candra dominion) in the Vaṅga territory, there is every reason to believe that these caturakas were located within the orbit of these territories.

38 D.C. Sircar (Sircar 1966: 68-9) subscribes to the view of the editors of Lekhapaddhati (Dalal and Sri-gondekar 1925: 9) that a caturaka was a police station or tax for the maintenance of a police station.

39 N.R. Ray took caturaka as a combination of four villages, deriving it evidently from the root of four (Ray 1994: 285). Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya seems to hold a somewhat similar view and believes further

that the name Kantallapura caturaka mentioned in the Bakultala plate was a village that headed a group of four villages Chattopadhyaya 1990: 36). Ranabir Chakravarti rightly hunches at its derivation from the root *chatuhí* and further suggests that this place-name had an association with a place (neither a village nor a town) where converged roads from different directions (Chakravarti 2002b).

40 The earliest reference to *pāṭaka* as a land measurement unit is found in the Gunaighar copperplate of the time of Vainyagupta. For an impressive study on the changing denominations of *pāṭaka* in different parts of early Bengal, refer Rita Ghosh-Ray (Ghosh-Ray 1993) and Chitrarekha Gupta (Gupta 1996). Evidences clearly suggest that the existence of *pāṭaka* as a measure of land does not seem to have been at stake at any point of time, the last known evidence of the kind being attested in the Rajabadi copperplate of Lakṣmaṇase-na.

41 It is curious to note that the same inscription also refers to the use of *pāṭaka* as a land measuring unit. Names of villages with *padraka*/*padrika*/seventh century in southwestern west Bengal, for example Kum-bharapadraka of the Antla plate and Kaparddipadraka of the Egra plate of the time of Śaśāṅka (for a discussion, Sircar 1965a: 376-77).

42 The term *parisara* may also be taken to mean contiguous or attached to; in that case it would imply that the actual place of issuance of the charter was close to the village mentioned. From the context of its occurrence of the term, however, an enclosed or fenced area seems more probable (Monier-Williams 2002: 604).

43 Rāmacarita describes Rāmāvatī of Rāmapāla's time as the city carrying an immense mass of gems, the city of gods and wealthy residents, the city having a series of lofty temples of gods and a city fit to be enjoyed by Kubera, the lord of Yakṣas and was excessively rich on account of its *Sevadhī* (Sastri 1969: 72, 78).

44 A recent archaeological study on the early mediaeval settlements in the Sabhar region is a further indication of such local linkages between eastern and southeastern territories of Bengal (Khan, Majid and Rahaman 2004). An intensive study of archaeological material continuously hailing from the present Khari regions of southeastern West Bengal may throw considerable light on the commercial linkages of this territory with areas farther east-southeast in the concerned period of time.

45 In deltaic formations, soil in coastal alluvial tracts around navigable water bodies and estuaries is often highly fertile for cultivation (Singh 1993: 286-87).

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Chapter Seven



The Cultural Heritage of Bengal: Aspects, Tradition and Legacy

**Rajib Chakraborty
Amitava Das**

This chapter deals with the ethos of Bengali culture as manifested in its various fronts starting from the prehistoric time. The discussions would be grouped under the following rubrics—

Food & Drink
Games and entertainment
Musical Heritage
Logistics
Dress
Coiffure
Decoration
Jewellery & Ornaments
Body Colour
Morality
Religious Practices and Festivals
Sculpture
Painting
Architecture
Temple Architecture
handicrafts

Culture, as explained by Raymond Williams (Williams 1960: XIV), “had meant, primarily, the ‘tending of natural growth’, and then, by analogy, a process of human training.” Williams further observes that “in the nineteenth century... it came to mean, first, ‘a general state or habit of the mind’, having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean ‘the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole’. Third, it came to mean ‘the general body of the arts.’ Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual’.” Here in this writeup the word “Culture” has been employed in the latter sense of the term, i.e., ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual’ as a living tradition.

The culture of a community is reflected in the various aspects of their daily life, such as food, clothing, language, behavior, entertainment, and celebrations. Human thought and creativity emerge through everyday routines. Culture is defined by refinement, adherence to rules, and a sense of order; it is through discipline that growth and cultivation take place, and culture is the result of their balance. The everyday practices of life reveal not only a person’s intellectual development but also, to some degree, their fundamental nature.

The cultural milieu of Bengal can be reconstructed from a variety of situations, including those involving food, clothing and jewelry, entertainment and games, celebrations, art and architecture.

The early tribal societies of the Austric and Dravidian speaking peoples are where Bengali culture and daily life have their symbiotic relations. As a result, these two languages contain remnants of things that have evolved over many years and are still present among them today. The earliest parts of human history, the history of words, hint at our enjoyments of food, dress, adornment, and the like. Books such as Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* and Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, which offer valuable insights into Bengali urban life, contain only limited information. Apart from these two texts, there is little available data about daily life in Bengal during the pre-Gupta and Gupta periods.

There is some information concerning food and dress as well as standards and ideals of family life at various class levels in numerous miscellaneous fragments of inscriptions from the Gupta period to the end of the ancient era, but it is in the stone and metal icons and the countless terracotta plaques that we find the most extensive and reliable information of all. Nearly all the images are regulated by a codified iconology. In the clothing and adornments of the deities, as well as their accessories, one can glimpse aspects of daily life, though these depictions are somewhat shaped and influenced by tradition. However, this is not the case with the many terracotta plaques found on the walls of the monasteries and temples of Pāhārpur and Maināmatī, which offer a more authentic and unembellished representation of the everyday life of common people. These secular artworks provide a much clearer reflection of life in rural village society than any other source.

Some information about daily life can be gained from Bengal's extensive collection of inscriptions from the fifth to the thirteenth century. Here, there are numerous details about food, pleasure, clothing, adornment, and life in both villages and towns, although many of these are presented through a lens of poetic imagination and embellished exaggeration. Specifically, regarding dress and adornment—and more broadly the social environment—it is possible to gather some information from the abundant stone and metal icons.

The most comprehensive information is found in the extensive body of Sanskrit, Prākṛit, and Apabhramśa literature. Works such as the abundant *Smṛiti* texts of Bengal, the *Vṛhaddharma* and *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas*, the *Caryāgīti* and *Dohākoṣa*, various verses in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* and *Prākṛta-paiṅgala*, the *Rāmacarita*, and poems like the *Pavanadūta* offer numerous insights into the daily lives of the Bengali people in different contexts. The time and place of these works are generally well-defined, with most of them being composed in Bengal between the tenth and the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. Additionally, *Srīharṣa's Naiṣadhacarita* contains a wealth of information about everyday life in Bengal.

The facts are scattered and discrete and most of them are post-tenth century, although some, no doubt, come from an earlier period. Indeed, it would appear that throughout the many centuries there was very little change in the rural lifestyle.

rice has been the major food. One of the greatest hardships in the lives of the Bengali people is captured in the lines of Caryā no.

33, hāḍīta bhāta nāhi
niti ābeśī (translated:
"No rice in the pot, yet
every day I have guests"),
reflecting the struggle
of having nothing to eat
despite the obligation to
host others.

There were, of course, different ways of cooking rice, but the usual custom was probably to eat it piping hot mixed with ghee. In the *Prākṛta-paṅgala* (likely from the late fourteenth century), it is described that the typical meal of the common people consisted of steaming hot rice mixed with ghee made from cow's milk, served on a banana leaf. There is a more detailed description in the *Naiṣḍhacarita*: 'As the rice is served the steam rises up from it; each grain is unbroken and separate from the others. The long-grained rice is well-boiled, very tasty, delicate and fragrant'. Creamed boiled rice was another favourite food at social functions and among the upper classes.

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सूजता, C. सुजुता, N. सुजुता । नातिच—B. K. नातिच । पुणमंता—
C. पुणमन्ता ।

Rice consumption is a legacy of the proto-Australoid community, paddy having been the staple product of this country since the dawn of history. Among the people of the higher classes as much as among those of the lower

[illegible]

Rice was usually eaten with spinach or some other vegetable, such vegetables probably being the major foodstuffs of the poor and village folk. Among the various spinaches mentioned in the Prākṛta-paiṅgala are the edible jute leaves. This work gives a list of the common people's food and then goes on to say that he is blessed whose wife can serve him daily hot rice on a banana leaf, ghee made from cow's milk, broth of mairala fish, and jute leaves. But at wedding feasts garden vegetables were not customarily appreciated by the bridegroom's party. We read of one particular wedding feast where many vegetable curries were served; they were excessive, even for upper-class Bengali society, yet their preparation was so fine that

১৪০	নন্দমা বিহঙ্গ দশম পাল্লা
১ বিহ-কোলে চাঁদো দাখ। হািল পাটন সনকা দহীয়া এখা কবিব কাথ। পূব দাক অখন নন্দকা পত্ববতী হেনকাথো পাটনে চলিলা নহপতি। হুহ সাত খই বালো খাচিরা প্রবেশে নব দািল অখ। অখ বইত হুহিবে। হুহ অত নাহিকেল পৰ্ব্বা নখাত বিহিৰ শিকি সখা করে নানবত। উত্তর তপুস-কতি হুহ ডিমি মিা হুহ-কেনি সখা বৈল প্রুহর কথিা। খাচিরা ডিখার হুহে হািল প্রুহ হিহেপুসি হুহ-কুহি হািল প্রুহ। নাহিকেল-পুসি হুহ-নামসি বিখর কলী সনকাতি কহিল ববতর। হাচিল শাকের কটী ডালি আত নবত কতের প্রোহর অথ। কথিা খ্যস। লাউখ খেল হাউত তাহে গু হিা পনবরা হাউখ বঁধু হাবতি হুইয়া। হুহি ডিহা কতিা ডালি ববতর কতি অত তপুস বিলেক অাপল। পক্ষাতে পৰ্ব্বা হিা তগায়া হািল আর বঁধু হিহি হুত চোহরি। হুহক হুইল হুত বোঁধা সবর পনবরা হিা মিা তাহার উপর। সবর মইত কীয়া আৰ আয়ল একাইত শালডিসি কতাবিয়া সবল। খাথে নাহিকেল প্রোহা বিলেক তাগাতে দলল সখা হিহি বিলেক পক্ষাতে। দন দন কতি মিা হাচিলো পাক্ষাতে শালা। ততুলের অখ হাউত হাবতিবে।	প্রোহর কহিল অখ খাখিতি বনে পরে প্রোহরেক পক্ষা-খাখিতি বার্বনে। বিহিৰি তাকন শিতি তাহাউত হুইয়া সনকা দহাখ খতি শাক কথিা। হুহ-কটী বালো অখ কতিা তপল প্রবেশে বিলেক শাক হুহিতি-নব। কথন কথন হিা হুহে অতক কেলে হিহেব সনকা দাখ। কতক প্রোহর। বতেক প্রোহর হিা শিষ্টক খাচিরা হুহ-কটী হিা দাখ। প্রুহর কথিা। বাটি অবি পনবরা বিলেক হিহেব অতুল সখা অখ অখন বিলেক। শালের সনকা দাখ। কহিল প্রোহর হুহাখিতি উহতে কহিল আতন। কপুৰি তাদুল পুগ পুহিয়া বন বিহিৰি পনবরা হুহে কথিা নব। মিকা নিতো নানা অখ জেই হুইল বন হাবতি তাহা। খাচিলে পুগ বপুগ। দন হািল বন হিা হিহে সপুৰি প্রোহরেক খাচিল হৈল উপর। প্রোহরেক-নব-হুহে হিহে কতর খাখাতি। হাখপল খািল সখর। ডাতিা। খাচিল হাখী দালী ডাউখাকট বিহি খিষ্টাল পক্ষা-পদপতি। ২ মতায়াসি হুহ অখন কটী অখন পদী উইত বৈলেক বোলাই হুইয়া অখি। একাইত উইত প্রোহা বহি। কখী বা পদীবে প্রোহ হুই কি না হু।

[illegible]

পঞ্চম দিবস : নিশা।	
দুহ লাউ দিয়া খও	জাল দিল দুই দণ্ড
শীতলন মহুরির বাসে	
মুগ সুপে ইচ্ছনস	কই ভাঙ্গে গণ্ডা দশ
মরিক গুড় দিয়া আদারস*	
দুসারিমিশ্রিত মাষ	রান্ধে দিয়া রসবাস
হিস্র জীরা বাসে সুবাসিত	
ভাজা চিত্তপেব কোল	কাতলা মাহের কোল
মান বাড়ি মরিক ভূষিত ।	
বোদানি হালিগা সাক	কাঠি দিয়া ঘন পাক
সাম্বলন কৈল কটু তৈলে	
কিছু ভাঙ্গে বালিকড়া	চিঙ্গড়ার তৈলে বড়া
বড়শালা পুজি দশ তোলে ।	
কারিয়া কটকহীন	আস্ত্রেতে শবুল মীন
বর লোন দিয়া ঘন কাঠি	
গ্রাসবে পাকাল কষ	দিয়া তেতুলের রস
বিরী রান্ধে জাল কারি ভাটি ।	
কলা-কড়া মুগ-সাতল	থিরোড়া থিরের পুলি
নানা পিঠা রান্ধে অবশেষে	
আ। রান্ধে অবশেষে	গ্রীকনিবন্ধন ভাবে
পতিত রজন-উপদেশে ॥	

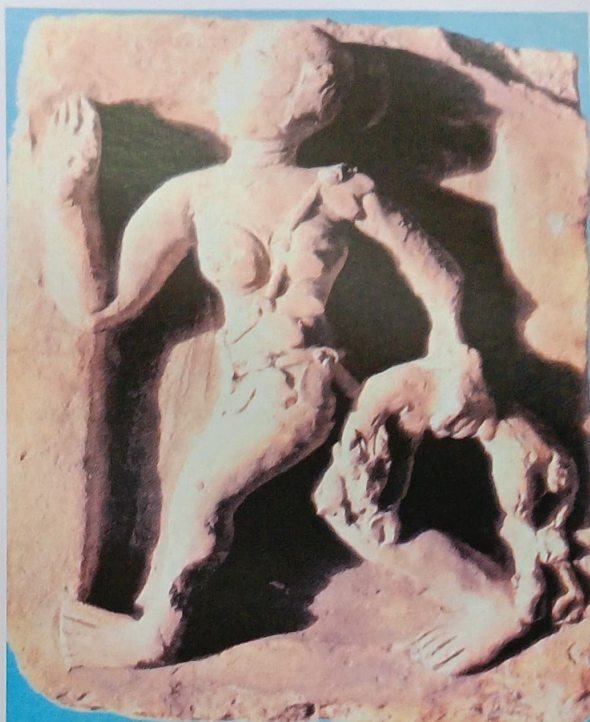
everything was eaten, and in quite copious quantities. Yijing spoke of the squandering involved in a great feast of this kind. We can, for example, list the dishes served at the wedding feast of Damayanti in the *Naiṣadhacarita*: a white, very pungent curry prepared with yoghurt and mustard (while eating it the guests shook and slapped their heads); various curries of venison, goat's meat and poultry; a curry of various ingredients, not of meat but of something notably similar; fish curry; and various other kinds of aromatic and profusely spiced dishes together with different kinds of sweets, yoghurt and the like. To drink, a fragrant water blended with camphor was served. From the Buddhist songs and couplets, we learn that camphor was used as a spice with pan.

Top : Textual description, found in *Manasāvijaya* and *Caṇḍimaṅgala*, of customary Bengali cuisine for celebrating pre-birth of a child, traditionally known as 'sādh' in Bengali culture

Far Right : Terracotta plaque found from, Paharpur temple, showing image of Śābara woman carrying prey

Image source: Haque, Enamul. 2007. *The Art Heritage of Bangladesh. Dhaka: The International Centre for study of Bengal Art*, P. 94 Plate 64

পঞ্চম দিবস : নিশা।	
দুহ লাউ দিয়া খণ্ড	জাল দিল দুই দণ্ড
শান্তলন মহুরির বাসে	
মুগ সুপে ইক্ষুরস	কই ভাজে গণ্ডা দশ
মরিচ গুড় দিয়া আদারসে ৷	
মুপরিমিশ্রিত মাষ	রাখে দিয়া রসবাস
হিঙ্গ জীরা বাসে সুবাসিত	
ভাজা চিতলেন কোল	কাতলা মাহের কোল
মান বাড়ি মরিচ ভূষিত ।	
যোদালি হিলিগা সাক	কাঠি দিয়া ঘন পাক
শান্তলন কৈল কটু তৈলে	
কিছু ভাজে বালিকড়া	চিপিড়ার তৈলে পড়া
বম্বুসাল পুগি দশ ভোণে ।	
করিয়া কটকহীন	আঙুঠে শকুল মীন
খর লোন দিয়া ঘন কাঠি	
রাকসে পাকাল ঝয়	দিয়া তেতুলের রস
খিরী রাখে জাল কারি ভাটি ।	
কলা-কড়া মুগ-সাগলি	খিরোড়া খিরের পুলি
নানা পিঠা রাখে অবশেষে	
থনা রাখে অবশেষে	প্রীকিপকরণ ভাষে
পণ্ডিত রন্ধন-উপদেশে ॥	



whether meat-eating, fish-eating or vegetarian, were complex and involved a great variety of ingredients.

There is frequent mention of dai, pāyes, kṣīr and other milk foods, which have always been favourites of the Bengali people. In the Prāyaścitta-prakaraṇa of Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa, there are several rules and prohibitions related to different types of milk-based drinks, all of which are aimed at promoting health and hygiene.

Of the meats, venison was enjoyed much, especially among the upper classes as well as such hunting peoples as the Śavaras and Pulindas. At all levels of society goat's meat was extremely popular. In some regions, among certain classes of people, it was customary to eat dried meat, although Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa expressly forbade this. However, it is very clear from a description of a feast in the Naiṣadhacarita that the cooking procedures of the Bengali people,

In Bengal, with the multitude of rivers and streams and canals and a Polynesian culture with proto-Australoid

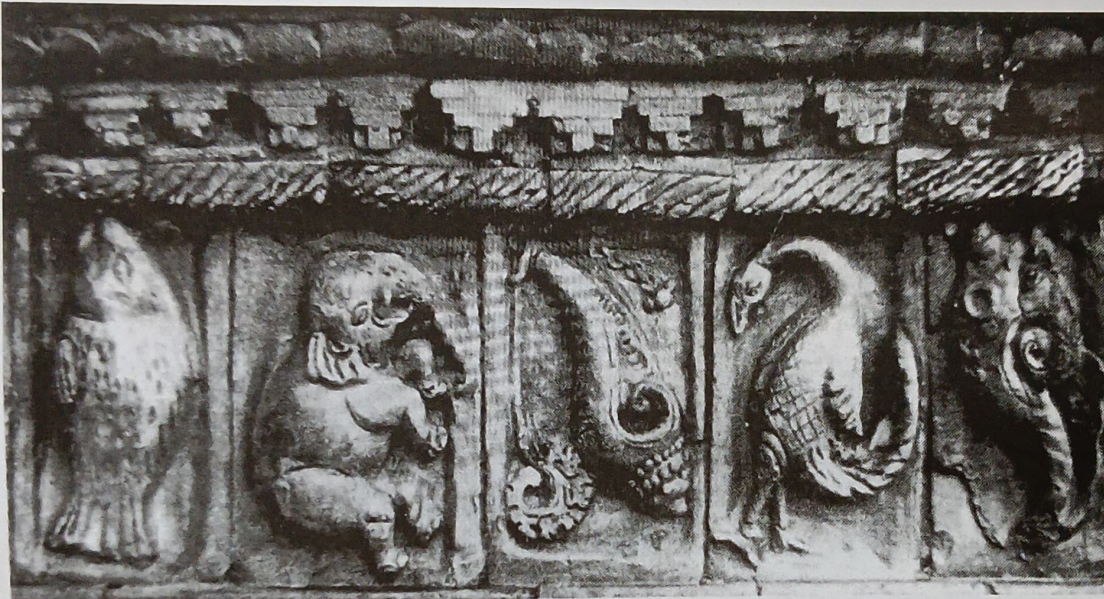


Right : Terracota plaque showing image of two fishes crossing

Image source: Haque, Enamul. 2014. *Pāhārpur Alias Somapura Mahāvihāra: A World Cultural Heritage Site*. Dhaka: The International Centre for study of Bengal Art, P. 51 Plate XLI

origins, it is not at all surprising that fish should be another staple, although Aryan civilization never looked at all favourably on this fondness of the Bengali people for fish. The Bengalis never had any particular aversion towards meat either, whereas Aryan India did; from the seventh and sixth centuries BCE in particular, especially in Brāhmaṇism and more so in Buddhism and Jainism,

saphara (pūṭi or sapharī), sakula (śola) and other white, scaly fish were edible by Brāhmaṇs. Having given a list of animal and vegetable oils and fats Jīmūtavāhana mentioned the oil of hilsa fish and described its various uses. It would seem that in ancient times as much as today hilsa fish was one of the favourite foods of the Bengalis and that its oil was used in a number of ways. However, not all



Left: Plate showing image of fish (at left corner), found from Paharpur. Image Source: Haque, 2014

a moral objection to the killing of life for food gradually restricted acceptable foods, and Aryan Brāhmaṇical India came to develop a preference for a vegetarian diet. There is no doubt that this influence also reached Bengal. However, Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa, one of Bengal's most prominent Smṛti scholars, had little choice but to defend, in a lengthy discourse, the widely accepted and deeply ingrained practice of eating meat and fish among the people of Bengal. Another of Bengal's Smṛti scholars, Śrīnāthācārya, did the same; quoting two verses from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa he tried to show that, except for a few holy days, on no day was the consumption of fish or meat an abomination. According to the Vṛhaddharma Purāṇa, rohita,

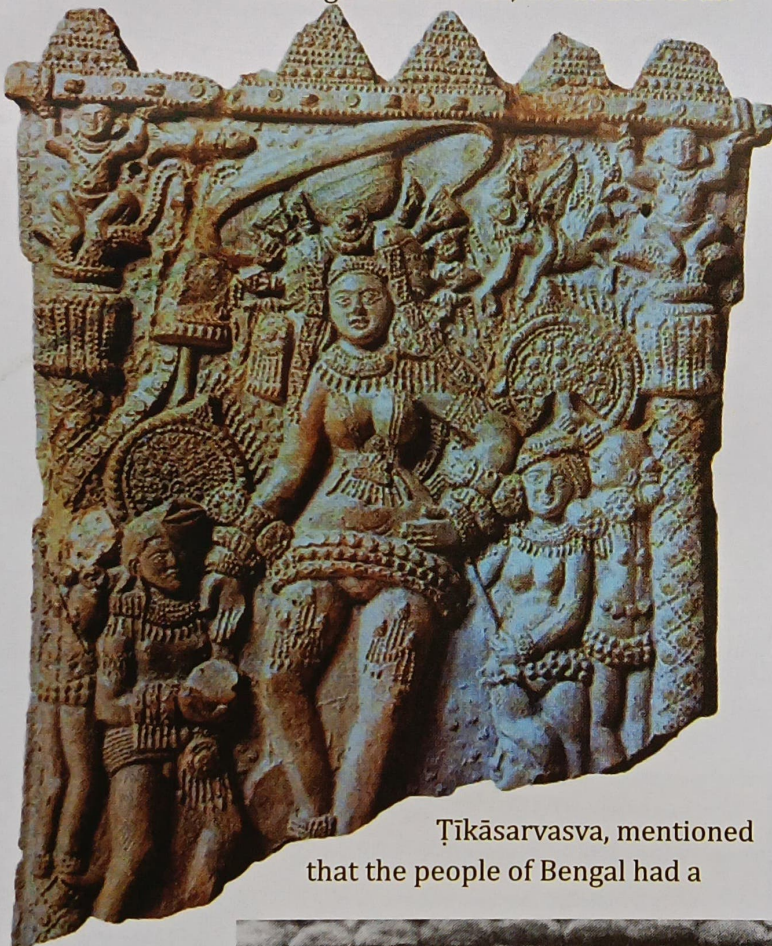


Below: Plate showing image of fish (at upper left corner), found from Chandraketugarh

Image Source: Haque, 2001

fish were considered permissible for Brāhmaṇas to eat. They were prohibited from consuming fish that lived in muddy waters, had snake-like heads and mouths (such as the bāṇa fish), or lacked scales. There were also restrictions on eating spoiled or dried fish, although Sarvānanda, the author of the

strong preference for dried fish. Such meat as snail, crab, rooster, breast of stork, duck, water-fowl, camel, cow and swine were completely forbidden, at least in the society regulated by Brāhmaṇical law. However, among lower-class people and the aboriginal people various kinds of disreputable fish and several types of poultry were all regarded as fit for consumption. In regard to five-clawed creatures, there was no strong objection to anyone eating iguana, rabbit, porcupine or tortoise. The Bengalis' love for fish is reflected in the terracotta plaques from Pāhārpur and Maināmatī, which depict two highly realistic scenes: one shows a person slicing fish, filling a bucket with them, and taking them to market. Another image portrays a Śavara man carrying a deer he had hunted over his shoulder, as hunting was the primary occupation of the Śavara, Pulinda, and Niṣād communities. In the Caryāgīti, Bhusuku suggests that deer were caught with nets, and it is also suggested that in the turbulence of mid-stream fish too were caught with nets.



Ṭikāsarvasva, mentioned that the people of Bengal had a

Many of the vegetables we consume today, such as brinjal, gourd, pumpkin,



cucumber, and root vegetables, are inherited from the proto-Australoid community and have been part of the Bengali diet since ancient times. In later periods, particularly during the medieval era, other vegetables like the potato

were introduced to Bengal, primarily through the efforts of the Portuguese and other foreign influences. However, these vegetables were not present in Bengal during ancient times. The Bengalis' custom of eating various edible creepers is also a very ancient one.

Among the fruits there is frequent reference to the banana, palmyra, mango, jackfruit, coconut and sugarcane; in the inscriptions there is prolific mention of the mango and jackfruit. The banana was

known to the proto-Australoid people, and in the painting and sculpture of ancient Bengal there are many realistic pictures of the banana tree bent low under the weight of its fruit. We learn from the literature of the times of the place of the banana tree in such ceremonies as pūjā, weddings and maṅgal festivities.

Left: Banana tree on a plaque from Chandraketurgarh

Image source- Haque, Enamul. 2001. P. 332

Left Bottom: Reference to new molasses (in bengali 'nalen guḍ') in Sadūktikarnāmṛta of Śrīdharadāsa

Right Bottom: Reference to tamarind in Caryā



As is so today, the drinking of sugarcane juice was greatly enjoyed, and from it a kind of molasses, and perhaps a type of sugar cube, was extracted. The villages of Bengal in autumn, redolent with the smell of the new molasses, are depicted in a descriptive verse of the Sadūktikarnāmṛta.

(२) शृङ्गाप्यबाहः १९१	
१७१ शिशिरप्रामा ।	
३११ बाभोर्गिना किमपि रंमति बासुरान्ते	
संपन्नशालिफलपल्लवितोपशस्याः ।	Srk. 303
प्रामास्तुवारम्बरम्बुरगोमयाभि-	वसन्तसिक्त
धूमावलीचलयमेकलिनो हरन्ति ॥१॥	
अग्निमस्य ।	
३१२ उद्धेतं जनयन्ति संचितवृषण्याः साजिरोपान्तकः	
प्राला शीर्णकुटीरपुञ्जितलताशिम्बीमुपाराविलाः ।	शाहूतविमीहित
प्रामा गोमयधूमसंततिपरिहृष्टारुणहमधुमि-	
रुद्धैः कुक्षनिवातलीननिधुनैरन्यथ्यमानातपाः ॥२॥	
योगेश्वरस्य ।	
३१३ शालिष्ठेद्वसन्तदहालिकपुष्टाः संसृष्टनीलोत्पल-	
क्षिप्रध्यामयवप्ररोहनिविष्टव्यादीर्घसीमोदराः ।	शाहूतविमीहित
मोदन्ते परिवृत्तधेन्वनदुहच्छायाः पलाशैर्नैवः	
संसकण्ठनविभुयम्बमुचरा प्रामा शुद्धामोदिना ॥३॥	
कस्तुरि ।	

वर्षागीतकोषः	
॥२॥	
[राग गवका कन्तरीपादानम् ।]	
हुलि' हुलि पिटा चरण न जान' ।	
करीर लेप्तालि' कुम्मीरे काम ॥ [१] ॥	
आङ्गुण' चरण सुन सो बिभासी' ।	
कानेट' बीरो' निल अथरासी ॥ अ वयय ॥	
सुसुरा निव गेल बहुरी जागम ।	
कानेट बीरे निल का गर मागम ॥ [२] अ ॥	
विचस्र बहुरी 'काउर डरे भाग' ।	
राति भाले कामक जाग ॥ [३] अ ॥	
अहसन वर्षा कुक्कुरी पाय' गारङ्ग ।	
कोङ्गि 'मार्वे' एक दिमहि' समारङ्ग ॥ [४] अ ॥	
1. rus sbal 'tortoise'; Cf. हुला, हुला 'a kind of small tortoise' in some of Bengali dialects; हुली हुलि in the pillar Inscriptions of Aśoka, No. १; कम्मी हुलि Amarakosa १०. २४. 2. H. जाह । 3. लेप्तालि' 'tamarind' has been rendered in Tib. bse yab 'a kind of sweet and acidulous fruit' [S. C. Das; A Tibetan English Dictionary, p. 1520 Col. १]; 4. Sgo mdum 'door-front'. 5. zig nan Lit. छ-इति । 6. It is probably to be derived from Prakṛta कण्ठीक an ear-ornament; Tib. rendering 'mdo phugs khañ logs' is not clear. 7 H. बीरे । 8...8. H. काउर डरे काम; bya rog mthoñ bas 'jigs 'is afraid to see the crow'. 9...9. H. वने' एकदिमहि' वनवय; gcig sñiñ 'jug srid dam एकद्व द्वने विराति' । १०. गवका is rendered in Tib. Chen Pa 'great' and probably to be derived from गीए through गैविपवीच; Cf. musical airs गवा and गारा ।	

Moulds for sweet making found from Chandraketugarh

In one of the Caryā songs there is mention of tamarind. We read in the Kālaviveka and the Kṛtyatattvārṇava that on the night of the full moon in the month of Āśvin, friends and relatives, replete with numerous kinds of sweets prepared from flattened rice and coconut, abandoned sleep to pass the entire night in dice-play. The custom of eating parched rice was probably popular then; descriptions of its being sprinkled profusely at wedding celebrations and at the Lājahoma ceremonies are evidence that at least it was known.

In addition to milk, coconut milk, cane-juice and palm-juice, many kinds of alcoholic drinks were very popular in ancient Bengal. The fame of the various Bengali wines prepared from molasses spread throughout India. In Caryā 5, Viruāpada wrote:

One is the pipe that connects two chambers:

(It) distils liquor with the fermenting ingredients (below) and the condensing cover (above).

Keeping the Innate undisturbed liquor is distilled:

So that one becomes unageing, undying, strong-shouldered.

Different types of fermented rice, wheat, molasses, honey, sugarcane, and palm juice were used to make wines.

In his Prāyaścitta-prakarāṇa Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa refers to a number of different kinds of liquor and describes their consumption as forbidden to everyone, twice-born or otherwise. In the Vṛhaddharma Purāṇa we read that

at times of scriptural prohibition gold, wine, blood, human sacrifice and fish and meat in religious offering were forbidden to Brāhmaṇas in the worship of Śiva. This probably means that if all these prohibitions applied to the Śiva pūjā, they probably did not apply to the Śakti pūjā, and that apart from the times of scriptural prohibition there were no such prohibitions at any other pūjā either. In several of the Caryā songs such mention is made of wine shops that it

২৪-পার্বত্য কোন্দল ।

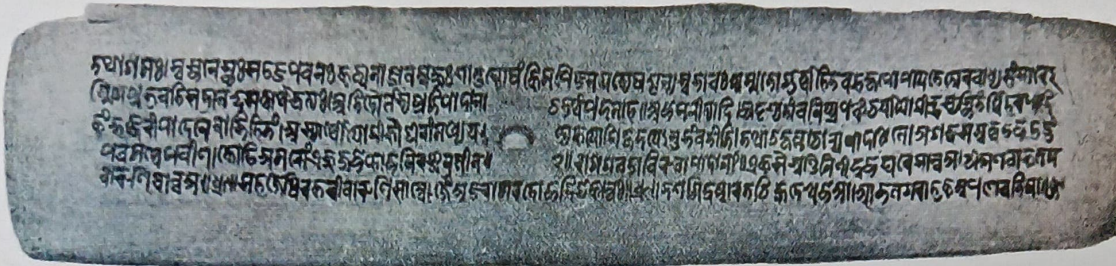
রাম রাম স্মরণেতে পোহাল রজনী ।
শয্যা হৈতে প্রভাতে উঠিল শূলপাণি ॥
নিত্য নিয়মিত কৰ্ম করি সমাপনে ।
বসিলেন মহাদেব অজিন আসনে ॥
বামদিকে কার্তিক দক্ষিণে লক্ষ্মীদর ।
গৃহিণী বলিয়া ডাক দিলেন শঙ্কর ॥
সম্মুখে উঠিয়া গোবী কবিল। অঞ্জলি ।
কঠিছেন শঙ্কর ভোজন-কুতূহলী ॥
কালি ভিক্ষা কবি তুংখ পাইল বহুধামে ।
সকালে খাটয়া অন্ন থাকিব আশ্রমে ॥
আজি গোবী বাকিয়া দিবেক মনোমত ।
নিম শিম বেগুণে বাকিয়া দিবে তিত ॥

সুকূতা শীতের কালে বড়ই মধুর ।
কুশাণ্ড বাষ্ঠাকু দিয়া বাকিবে প্রচুর ॥
ঘূতে ভাজি শক্রাতে ফেলহ ফুলবড়ি ।
চোঁয়া চোঁয়া করিয়া ভাজহ পলাকড়ি ॥
বাকিবে ছোলার ডাল তাতে দিবে খণ্ড
আলু তাজিয়া আল দিবে দুই দণ্ড ॥
বাকিবে মশুব সুপ দিয়া লঘু আল ।
সন্তোলিয়া দিবে তথি মরিচের ঝাল
নটিয়া কাঠাল বীচি সারি গোটা দশ ।
ঘূত সম্বিয়া দিবা জামিরের বস ।
কড়ুই কবিয়া বাকি সরিষার শাক ।
কটু তৈলে বাথুয়া কবহ দঢ় পাক ॥
বাকিবে মুগের সুপ দিয়া ডাব জল ।
খণ্ডে মিশাইয়া বাকি করঞ্জের ফল ॥
আমড়া সংযোগে গোরী বাকিহ পালঙ্ক
ঝাট স্নান কব গোরী না কব বিলম্ব ॥
গোটা কাসুন্দিতে দিবা জামিরের রস ।
এবেলাব মত বাকি এ ব্যঞ্জন দশ ॥

would seem that the drinking of wine was not looked on with disgust by the

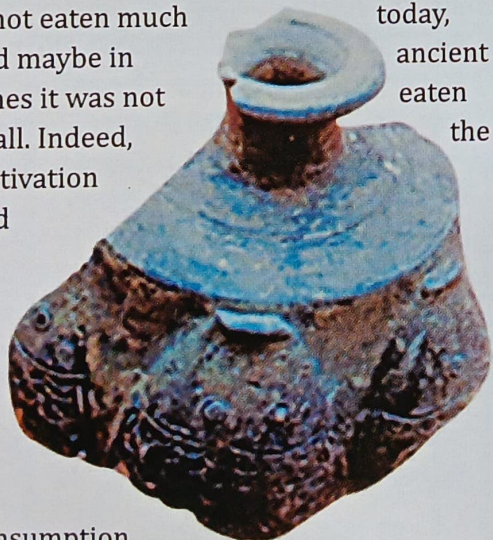
unappealing and socially undesirable by non-Bengalis, and this perception

Left: Caryā no 3 on wine making
Text: eka se suṇḍiniṇi
dui ghare sāndhaa / ciana
bākālaa bāruṇi bāndhaa
English Translation (by
Sukumar Sen): “One is
the pipe that connects
two chambers: (It) distils
liquor with the fermenting
/ ingredients (below) and
the condensing cover
(above).”



Buddhist Siddhācāryas. In a verse of the Sadūktikarṇāmṛta there is mention of liquor in the cup formed of a wood apple, and in the Caryāgīti Viruvāpāda sings of wine being poured into pitchers.

In the lists of foods of the ancient Bengalis nowhere do we see any mention of ḍāl. There is nothing surprising in that, for much as ḍāl is enjoyed today very little of it is produced in Bengal, Assam and Orissa where its production in earlier times was probably even more rare. On the lower levels of Bengali society ḍāl is not eaten much today, and maybe in times it was not at all. Indeed, cultivation and



consumption off ḍāl is probably a medieval Aryan legacy.

Since ancient times, the diet of the fish-eating Bengalis was considered

persists even today. When the Jaina monk Mahāvīra and his disciples were traveling



Top: Image of a Dice game on a terracotta plate from Khanamihirer Dhipi

Image source: <https://swayamkatha.wordpress.com/tag/chandraketugarh/>

through the barren regions of Rāḍha and Vajrabhūmi, preaching their teachings, they would have been forced to consume food that was considered improper or unclean, and there can be no doubt that the diet of the ordinary Bengalis of the time aroused the disgust of the vegetarian Jaina ācāryas.

Games and entertainment

A primary form of recreation for kings and vassals was hunting, both small and large game, while hunting also served as the main livelihood for forest-

Left Bottom: Pottery showing image of fish, found from Chandraketugarh. Image source: Haque, 2001

dwelling communities like the antyaja, mlechha Śavaras, Pulindas, Caṇḍālas, and Vyādhyas. In the terracotta plaques from Pāhārpur and Maināmatī, there are depictions of these communities engaging in hunting. The plaques also show that wrestling and other physical activities were common pastimes among the lower classes.

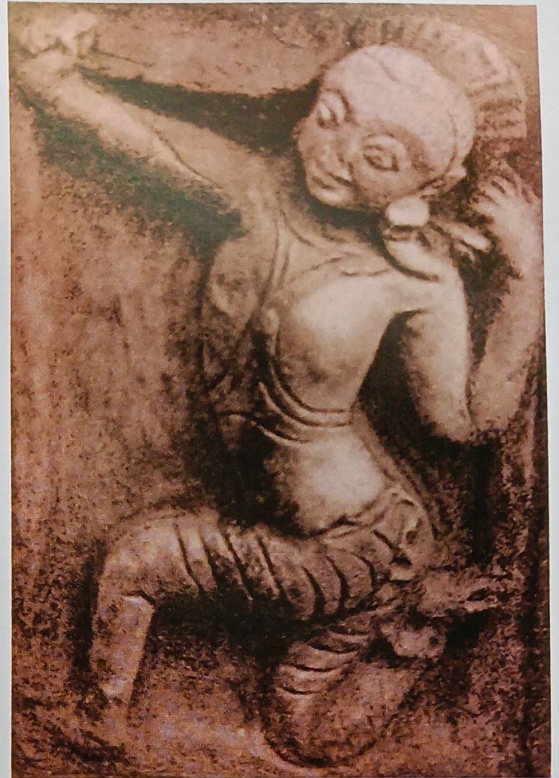


Top: Toy cart from Chandraketugarh

Image source: Haque, 2001, p.309

In the Pavanadūta, there are references to water games and gardening, likely the primary physical activities for women. Dyūta, or dice games, as well as chess, were very popular; in fact, a game of dice was considered a central part of wedding celebrations. While it's unclear exactly when chess became widespread in Bengal, the Caryāgīti mentions chess pieces such as ṭhākur (or rājā), mantrī, gajavara, and baṛe, along with the game's moves and the sixty-four squares on the board, suggesting that chess was already popular in Bengal well before the tenth or eleventh century.

It can easily be assumed that among the lower classes, and women, that various kinds of games played with cowries were also very popular at that time. An extensive study of sociology suggests



that all these games were primitive indoor pastimes of the very ancient tribal societies throughout all of southeast Asia and of the countries and Islands of the Pacific Ocean.

We learn from Sarvānanda's Ṭikāsarvasva something of the popularity of gambling. Wagers were laid on cock fights and ram fights, and upper-class men bet on elephant and horse races.

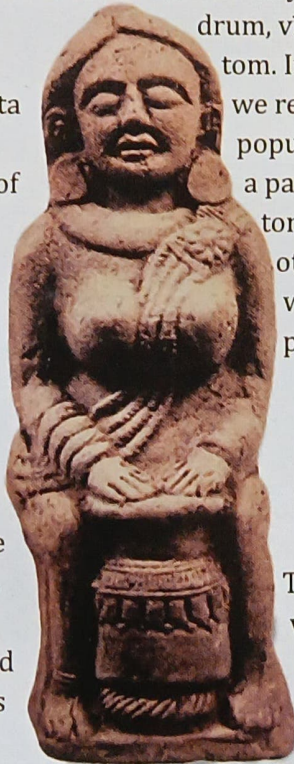
Musical Heritage

There is ample evidence of the extent and popularity of dancing, singing and instrumental music, all of which are mentioned in such poems as the Rāmacarita and the Pavanadūta, in various inscriptions, and in miscellaneous verses of the Sadūktikarṇāmṛta, the Caryāgīti and the Dohakoṣa.

It is evident that people of all levels of society were exceptionally fond of these

Top Right: Sculptures from Paharpur of men dancing

arts and entertainments. Furthermore, all prostitutes and temple girls were expected to be accomplished in music and dance. We learn from the *Rājatarāṅginī* that the singing and dancing of the *Kārtikeya* temple in *Puṇḍravardhana* were in accordance with the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of *Bharata*, and in the terracotta plaques of *Pāhārpur* and *Maināmatī* as well as in many metal and stone statutes there are countless depictions of men and women given to dancing at various styles. In both the *Vṛhaddharma* and *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas* dancers are mentioned as belonging to a distinct caste, low on the social scale, yet some people of the upper classes took to dancing as a profession. *Jayadeva's* wife, *Padmāvatī*, was an expert dancer before her marriage and was also renowned as a musician. In the *Pāhārpur* and *Maināmatī* plaques, as well as in some stone carvings, there is intimation of the different kinds of musical instruments, such as percussion instruments of bell metal and clay, cymbals, drum, *vīṇā*, flute and tom-tom. In the *Rāmacarita* of the *Varendrī* of type of perhaps types also



elsewhere in Bengal. gourd mentioned the verses

drum, *vīṇā*, flute and tom-tom. In the we read popularity in a particular tom-tom; other were popular

The *vīṇā* is in one of the



Left: Sculptures holding a flute

Sadūktikarṇāmṛta. It is in the *Caryāgīti*, however, that we find the most extensive and intimate account of vocal and instrumental music, the variety of instruments, and what were probably musical dramas. Here, we also learn that the *Ḍombīs* were known for their love of singing and dancing. They crafted an instrument similar to a *vīṇā* from a gourd shell and played it by striking its strings with a bamboo rod. They traveled from village to village, performing their songs. A reference to a Buddha drama in one of the *Caryā* lyrics is particularly significant, suggesting that a form of drama, perhaps combining song and dance to depict special events, was popular in ancient Bengal. It was likely due to their inclination toward singing and dancing that the *Ḍombīs* and other women of lower social status were not held to the same strict moral codes, allowing them to captivate men of higher classes in many cases. As well as that, the *Sahajayānīs* and

Left: Sculpture of a female, From *Chandraketurgh* playing drum

Kāpālikas, free from any caste or class restrictions, were not restrained from taking them as partners in Yogic rituals.

In contemporary art and literature, there is clear evidence of singing and dancing both in everyday life and during various social and religious celebrations. In a song by Kāhnapāda from the Caryāgīti, there is a vivid, albeit brief, depiction of a wedding celebration, within which several musical instruments are mentioned.

Logistics

On land the ordinary people went about on foot, but on water, of course, they used rafts and boats. Words such as *bhelā* (raft) and *ḍiṅgā*, *ḍiṅgī*, or *ḍoṅgā* (small boat, canoe) are derived from the Austric language, and so it would seem that from the very earliest times the Bengalis had quite a close association with water craft. Mention of boats, ports, ferry stations, river commerce, masts and so on in connection with trade, but an understanding of the intimate connection between boats and

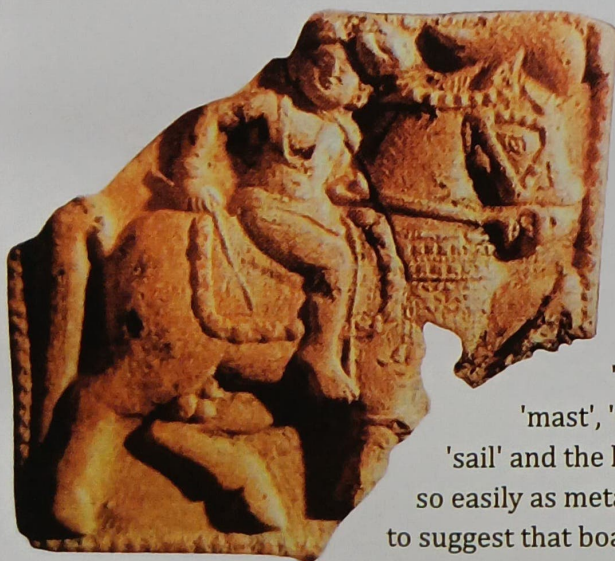
very much a part of the lives of the Bengali people. There are also references to ferry crossings, where the fare was paid in cowries or *boṛi* coins, and it was often low-class women who performed the ferrying. Given Bengal's extensive network of rivers and streams, it is not surprising that concepts and metaphors related to spiritual life often revolve around boats and waterways. As seen in the Caryāgīti, we encounter such imagery: "Flowing fast is the deep and sombre stream of the river of life; both the banks are muddy, and the middle of the stream is unfathomable."

Left plaque: shows a man riding a well decorated horse, found from Mahasthangarh. Image source: Haque, 2014

Right plaque shows three men riding a well decorated elephant, found from Chandraketugarh. Image source: Haque, 2001



This picture is



Bengali life can be gained from the Caryāgīti, where 'boat', 'rudder', 'tow-rope', 'oarsman', 'mast', 'water-bailer' 'sail' and the like are used so easily as metaphors as to suggest that boats were

patently one drawn from the rivers of Bengal—the two banks piled with muddy silt and the deep, sombre stream of the river is, indeed, the Gaṅgā, Padmā, Meghnā or Lauhitya. We read in a song of Sarahapāda: "To the left of the road, and to the right, are canals and channels" Saraha says, "Take the straight road. Do not go into the maze of waterways, but go straight on."—this is a clear picture of Bengal.

The bullock dray was the most popular form of road transport from village to distant village or town. We find no mention of the buffalo wagon although-given the authenticity of



Plaque showing a chariot being drawn by four horses, two riders, found from Chandraketurgh. Image source: Haque, 2001

the *Naiṣadhacarita* the ancient Bengalis were accustomed to the curdled milk of the buffalo. In the accounts of the Greek historians, we note that the kings of *Prācyā* and *Gaṅgārāṣṭra* had chariots, each drawn by four horses, and there is no reason to doubt that upper-class people used horse-drawn vehicles. The Greek historians noted that the great strength of the *Gaṅgārāṣṭra* army was its force of elephants, and in numerous inscriptions there is much mention of such forces. In east India, from very ancient times, the elephant was regarded as an important vehicle, and in Bengal and *Kāmarūpa*, particularly, a special science for the capture and care of elephants was developed. Haraprasad Sastri said that elephant medicine was one of the great achievements of Bengal. Many of the songs in the *Caryāgīti* and the *Dohākoṣa* contain elephant metaphors which reveal a close connection between this beast and the lives of the Bengali people. As today in setting up a *kheda* for the capture of an elephant it is necessary to take the elephant and its young as well, we learn that that was the case in ancient Bengal too. Elephants roamed freely along the banks of the mountain streams of

northern and eastern Bengal, and in one of the songs of *Vīṇāpāda* it is said that the elephant's mind was charmed before its capture by the singing of boatmen's songs. Bengal was also well-known for its expertise in traditional elephant medicine.

Writers ranging from

Kautilya and Greek historians to Yuan Chuang all described the eastern region as a place associated with elephants, and Kautilya specifically mentioned elephant physicians. Therefore, it is not surprising that specialized treatises on elephant medicine were written in this region. The sage *Pālakāpya*, also known as *Pilakippa*, discussed this topic extensively with *Romapīda*, the king of *Campa*, and their lengthy dialogue became famous as the *Hastyayurveda*. Evidence suggests that this book was written before the tenth century. The chapter on elephant medicine in the *Agni Purāṇa* was based on the dialogues of *Pālakāpya* and *Romapāda*, and the scriptural part of the *Agni Purāṇa* was written before the tenth century; *Pālakāpya* is quoted a number of times in the eleventh century *Amarakoṣa* commentary of *Kṣīrasvāmī*. It is virtually indisputable that from very ancient times the eastern region had a tradition of elephant medicine and that a number of books were written on the subject. But the *Hastyāyurveda* of *Pālakāpya* as we have it is not, in thought or form, a product of very ancient times. It was very likely compiled, relying on older works, somewhere beside the *Brahmaputra* in the sixth or seventh century.



Top: showing elaborate scene of journey of an aristocrat with his retinue, guards, animals etc., on the bottom frieze of the southern side of Kāntajī temple of Dinajpur, Bangladesh.

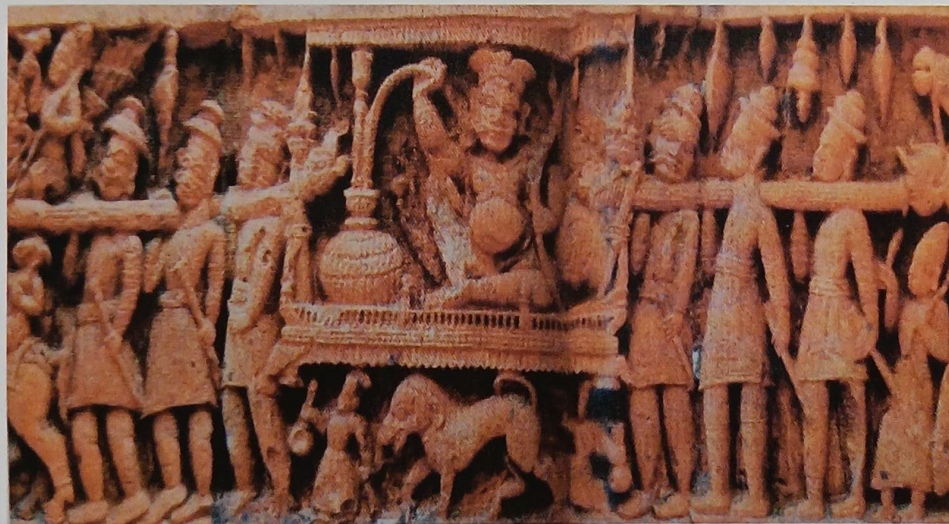
The design of the bullock cart has remained unchanged since ancient times, as evidenced by ancient stone and terracotta plaques found in Bengal and other parts of India. Bullock carts were also used by bridegroom processions, as indicated in one of the songs from

In the Idilpur inscriptions of Keśavasena there is indirect mention of a palanquin manufactured in ivory, with a carrying pole, and it is said that Vallālasena carried away the queens of his enemies in such a palanquin as this.

With such a plethora of waterways there was a need for bridges in getting from one locality to another and so, from very ancient times, the Bengalis were familiar with bamboo or timber bridges. In one song in the Caryāgīti, we learn that Cāṭilapāda made the Pāragāmi people a bridge so that they could cross the river without fear. Having

split a large tree with an axe, the planks were fastened and the bridge was made strong.

From the descriptions of Rāmāvatī and Vijayapur in the Rāmacarita and Pavandūta, as well as from the ruins of places like Vāṅgarḥ, Rāmapāla, Mahāsthān, and Deopārā, it appears that the wealthier townspeople lived in mansions of varying sizes, constructed from brick and



Top: showing Scene of travel of a gentry on a beautifully palanquin, on the Kantaji temple of Dinajpur. Image source: Haque, 2014

the Caryāgīti. On one of the Pāhārpur terracottas there is a depiction of a richly adorned horse, and mounted on horses dressed in this way rich people would go about, accompanied by music.

Apparently, palanquins were used too.

timber. The royal palace was also made of these materials. However, there is no information available about the specific shape or style of these buildings. In contrast, it seems that villages did not have large houses made of brick or

timber. The poor, lower-class people and even the wealthy householders lived in homes of mud, straw, bamboo, wood and the like; the terracotta plaques suggest that the roofs were thatched with straw, the walls made of interwoven bamboo slips, and the posts were also of bamboo or of timber. The binding of a wall with bamboo slips is described in the *Caryāgīti*. Walls were also made of mud; this was so in the *Rārha* region and in northern *Vaṅga*, whereas in the eastern regions they were of bamboo slips. From the depictions on the stone and clay plaques and the manuscript decorations it appears that then, as now, the roofs were constructed on posts of bamboo or timber and were arched or pyramid-shaped on two or three levels. The really poor householders and low-class workers lived in small, thatched huts, so faithfully described in a verse in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*: “The wooden posts are wobbling, the softening mud walls are crumbling away, the straw on the thatched roof is blowing off; my run-down home is crawling with frogs ardently searching for worms.” Such a substantive, poetic description of the misery of a poor householder's dilapidated home during the rains in the watery eastern lands and in the many slums of Bengal is, indeed, notable.

In works like the *Caryāgīti*, the *Rāmacarita*, and the *Pavandūta*, we can find references to various household goods and possessions, many of which are also depicted on stone and terracotta plaques. While the wealthy used gold and silver plates and utensils, the average village families typically ate and drank from bell metal vessels, and the poor

often relied on clay items. Among the terracottas of *Pāhārpur* and *Maināmatī*, as well as on several stone plaques, we see representations of everyday objects such as earthen toys, vases,



Top: Mithuna, terracotta, Govinda Bhita, Bogra, Image source: Haque, 2007

bedsteads, pitchers of different designs, drinking and eating vessels, clay barrels, metal pots, inkwells, lampstands, jars, small wooden stools, and bookcases. These household items were commonplace. The *Rāmacarita* also mentions furniture and accessories, often with intricate gold embellishments. In the *Tabaqāt-i-Nasīrī* it is said that gold and silver eating utensils were used at the palace of *Lakṣmaṇasena*. Iron water vessels are mentioned in the *Idilpur* inscription of *Keśavasena*.

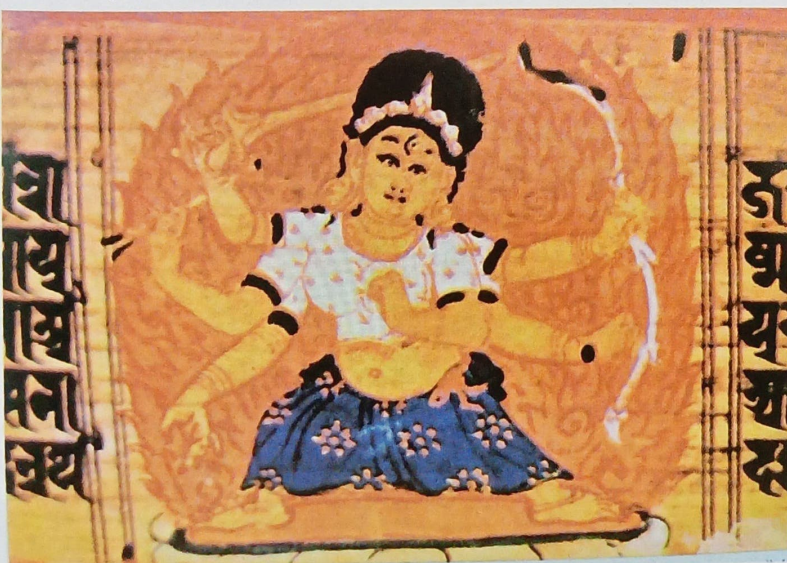
Dress

The dress of ancient Bengali people especially in the port of *Chandraketugarh*,

Right & below right:
terracotta plaque from
Chandraketugarh showing
the dress of ancient
Bengali people. Image
source: Haque, 2001



Below: Manuscript
painting of Pāla period
showing image of
Buddhist goddess
Mahāsahasrapramardīnī
(11th century CE),
Wearing blue floral
designed sari. Image
source: Haque, 2007



Tāmrālīpta etc. can be traced from so many terracotta plates found during excavation of those sites. A rich urban society with its all grandeur has been reflected from the clothes and ornaments used by the people dated back to at least 3rd century BC and also connect the pre-colonial tradition of Bengali people. The Kashmiri poet Kṣemendra, in his work *Daśopadeśa*, describes the students from Gauṛa living in Kashmir. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, many students

from Gauṛa traveled to Kashmir for education. Kṣemendra portrayed them as crude and vulgar in their nature and behavior, with a heightened awareness of the strict rules of untouchability. He

noted that their bodies were frail, almost skeletal, and it seemed as though a slight push could cause them to collapse. Because of this, people tended to keep their distance from them.

The Gauṛa students would walk slowly along the road, intermittently nodding their proud heads this way and that, and as they walked their peacock-shaped slippers would make a repeated snapping sound. Occasionally one would survey his own fine

appearance: seeming to be Kūvera, the god of wealth, he would wear a red sash around his slender waist, three golden ornaments in his ears, and carry a cane in his hand. Yet with his dark complexion and rows of white teeth he looked more like a monkey who, on the least pretext, would flare into anger. This account gives us some understanding of the dress and embellishment of the Bengali student abroad, but for a more extensive

description

one must search the antiquities and the literary works of old Bengal, from which evidence it is not difficult to draw a general picture of dress and



ornamentation.

In ancient times, the practice of wearing stitched clothing was not common in eastern, southern, or western India, where

people typically wore a single, unstitched piece of cloth. Over time, the trend of wearing stitched shirts was introduced from central and northwest India. However, when it came to lower garments, the Bengalis, Tamils, Gujaratis, and Mārāthis continued to wear the dhoti instead of switching to loose, pleated pajamas. The dhoti and the śāṛī

were the usual dress of Bengali men and women, but amongst some of the wealthy people it was fine and fashionable to wear another

single, unstitched piece as an upper garment; for men this was the *uttariya* and for women the *oṛāna*. The *oṛāna* could also be employed

as a hood, but the habit of ordinary women was to wear a single piece and to draw its surplus end to serve as a head cover.

The ancient Bengali men did not wear the end of the dhoti hanging to the ankle

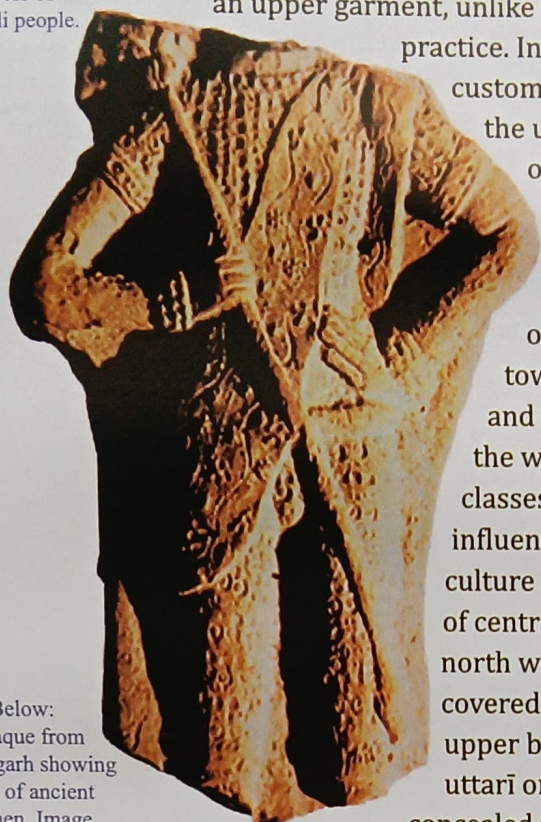
as is the fashion today. In ancient times the dhoti was considerably smaller, in width and in length. Normally the width of the cloth extended only to the knee. The middle of the dhoti was wrapped at the waist and the two ends were drawn together at the back; the cloth was



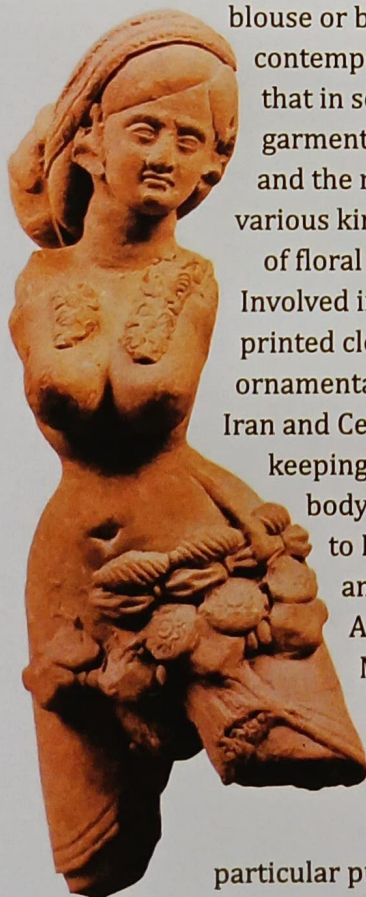
fastened at the waist by two or three tucks just below the navel where the fastening knot hung. Some men tucked one end of the dhoti behind them, the other end being folded and hung in front. The way women wore the śāṛī in ancient times was quite similar, but the śāṛī was wider than the dhoti, with its width reaching the ankle, and the end of the cloth was not tucked in at the back. Today, Bengali women secure the lower garment at the waist with one or more tucks, as was done in the past. However, ancient women did not use the end of the śāṛī as

Terracotta plaques from Chandraketugarh showing the dress of ancient Bengali people. Image source: Haque, 2001

Top left: Terracotta plaque from Chandraketugarh showing the dress of ancient Bengali people.



Top right & Below: Terracotta plaque from Chandraketugarh showing the hairstyles of ancient Bengali Women. Image source: Haque, 2001

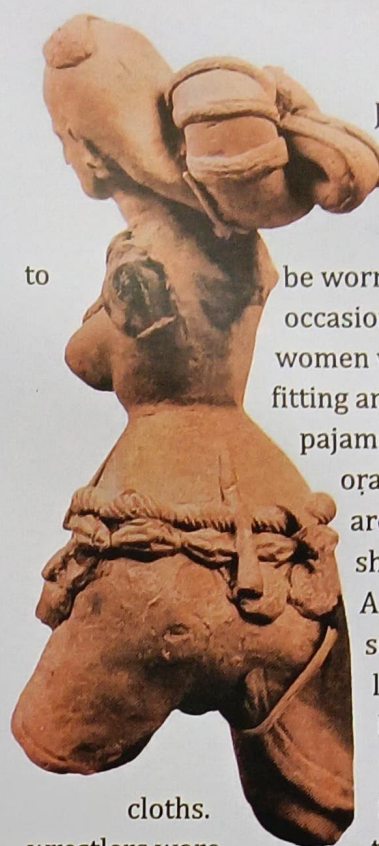


an upper garment, unlike the current practice. Instead, the custom was for the upper part of the body to remain uncovered. But some of the towns-women and those of the wealthy classes, probably influenced by the culture and customs of central and north west India, covered part of the upper body with an *uttarī* or *oṛana*, or concealed their breasts

with a *coli*. Others wore a kind of a blouse or bodice. It is quite evident from contemporary illustrated manuscripts that in some cases such female upper garments, together with the *śāṛī* and the man's dhoti, were printed in various kinds

of floral and geometric designs. Involved in the history of this pattern-printed cloth is the intricate and ornamental relationship between India, Iran and Central Asia. The tradition of keeping the upper half of a woman's body uncovered was not restricted to Bengal, but was customary among all the ancient proto-Australoid, Polynesian and Melanesian communities.

For gatherings and special occasions certain kinds of clothing were appropriate for particular purposes. In the *Dāyabhāga*,



Jīmūtavāhana described the kinds of clothing to be worn on various occasions. Dancing women wore tight-fitting ankle-length pajamas and a long *oṛana* draped around the shoulders. Ascetics and society's low-caste labourers wore loin cloths. Soldiers and tight-fitting, thigh-length pajamas, a style occasionally adopted by regular laborers as well, as evidenced by the *Pāhāṛpur* plaques. Children likely wore knee-length dhotis, snug pajamas, or a loincloth tied around the waist.

Coiffure

Similar to modern times, ancient Bengalis did not wear headgear, opting instead to decorate their heads with carefully arranged hairstyles. Men frequently grew their hair long, resembling a mane. Some women twisted their long hair into a bun at the back of the neck, while others let it hang loose. Ascetics arranged their matted hair in two layers on top of their heads. Children typically had their hair tied in three locks above their heads.

It is evident from the plaques of the *Pāhāṛpur* and *Maināmati* that warriors used footwear, as did guards and

gatemmen, and it was made of leather in a fashion that covered the ankles; these shoes were open and unlaced. The ordinary people probably did not wear leather footwear, although there are suggestions in the



Karmānuṣṭhāna-paddhati of Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa and the Piṭṛdayita of Jimūtavāhana of men using both wooden and leather footwear. The wearing of clogs was, indeed, common amongst the wealthy. The use of bamboo sticks and umbrellas was popular, and watchmen, gatemmen and wrestlers all carried very long bamboo staves.

Married women adorned the forehead with a spot of collyrium and the parting of the hair with a line of vermillion. Sandalwood paste, musk and saffron were used to adorn the face and body. Vātsyāyana wrote that the men of Gaurā adorned their hands and had attractive long nails which they painted, perhaps to please the young women. There is no evidence that women painted their nails, but that they highlighted their eyes with collyrium is suggested in the Caṭṭagrām inscription of Dāmodaradeva. In the Manhalī inscription of Madanapāla it

is suggested that camphor was used in dressing, and the use of paint is indicated in the Bhāgalpur inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla. The Bengali poets of the time described how lac applied to the lips and a flower inserted in the bun of hair were part of the make-up of young women. According to the Nālandā inscription of Devapāla, the Manhalī inscription as well as some verses of Govardhanācārya in the Adbhutasāgara of Vallālasena, a woman, on becoming a widow, removed the vermillion from the parting of her hair (bandhanabhājo'muṣyāḥ cikura kalāpasya muktamānasya / sindūrīta sīmāntacchalena ḥṛdayaṁ bidīrṇamev

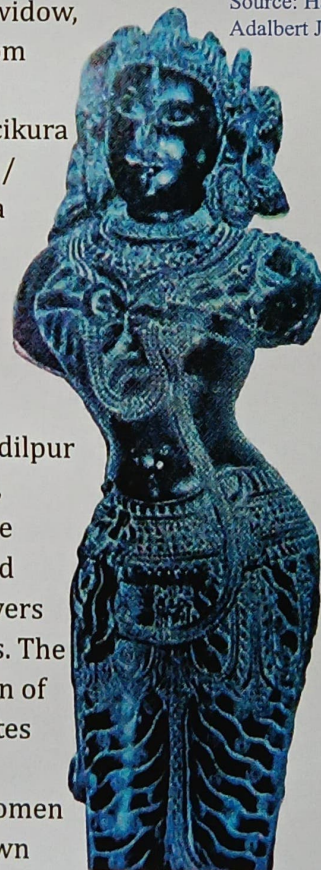
Upper left & Right: Terracotta plaque from Chandraketurah showing the hairstyles of ancient Bengali Women.



Below: Black Basalt Sculpture of ornamented Goddess Gaṅgā. Image Source: Haque, Enamul / Adalbert J. Gail, 2008.

Decoration

From the Bhagalpur inscription and from the Idilpur inscription of Keśavasena, we learn that women wore garlands of flowers around their necks as well as flowers inserted in their hair buns. The Sāhitya Pariṣad inscription of Viśvarūpasena corroborates other contemporary inscriptions in that the women of the various levels of town



Right: Śālabhañjikā
figure in wood-cut from a
temple in Hughly showing
ancient Bengali women's
clothing, accessories.
Image source: Haque,
2014

society, especially the married ones, having towards evening bathed in the river or pond and dressed, made up and ornamented themselves, were conspicuous as pictures of joy and splendour. The Deopara eulogy of Vijayasena reveals that they applied camphor and musk to their breasts. In dress and decoration, the women of the towns followed the fashions of north India; the royal women, in fact, had come from various parts of the country and the fashions of the royal family were usually conformed to by town society. A reliable picture of the attire of the town women is available in Sadūktikarṇāmṛta. (vāsaḥ sūkṣmaṁ vapuṣi bhujayoḥ kāñcanī cāṅgadaśrīr / mālāgarbhaḥ surabhi maṣṭṭairgandhatailaiḥ śikhaṇḍaḥ / karṇottamse navaśaśikalānirmalaṁ tālapatram / veśaṁ keśaṁ na harati mano vaṅgavārāṅganāma)

Dhoyī, the writer of the Pavanadūta, spoke of an ear ornament of delicate, fresh palm leaf, and said that 'in elegant Suhma' the tender palm leaf shaped like a crecent moon adorned the ears of Brāhmaṇa ladies ([rasamaya suhmadeśaḥ] śrotrābharaṇapadavīm bhūmidevāṅganānām / tālipatram navaśaśikalā komalaṁ yatra yāti). In the third chapter of the Kāvya-mīmāṃsā, Rājaśekhara, purporting to describe the toilet of the women of Prācyā, describes only that of the ladies of Gauṛa; perhaps this was the yardstick (ārdrādracandana kucārpita sūtrahāraḥ / sīmanta-cumvisicayaḥ sphūṭavāhumūlaḥ / dūvāgrakāṇḍa rucirāsvagurūpabhogād / gauṛāṅganāsu cirameṣa cakāstu veśaḥ).



But then there was the picture of the simple, natural beauty of the village women, who did not choose the fine fashions of adornment of the townswomen so given to luxury. Govardhanācārya comments: ṛjunā nidhehi caraṇau parihara sakhi nikhilanāgarācāram / iha ḍākinīti pallīpatiḥ kaṭākṣe'pi daṇḍayati. The poet Candracandra spoke of the dress and adornment of a village beauty:

'On her forehead a touch of collyrium, around her wrist

a bangle of lotus stalks seeming like moonbeams, in her ear an ornament of fresh rīṭha flower, and linseed leaves in her braids the traveller is arrested by the sweetness of the village woman.' (bhāle kajjvalabindurikiraṇaspardhī mṛṇālāṅkuro / dorvallīṣu ślāṭuphenilaphalottamaśca karṇātithiḥ / dhammillastilapallavābhiṣaṇasnigdha svabhāvadayaṁ)

The ordinary village girls as well as those of the poorer homes in the towns performed their household tub and also had to work in the fields for their families' benefit; they had to buy and sell goods in the market and to wait upon their husbands, sons and daughter. A beautifully natural, poetic picture of women employed in this way has been painted by the poet Śaraṇa in a verse which also tells, incidentally, that they wore single-piece garments.



In Vijayasena's Deopārā eulogy there are suggestions of various kinds of linen doth, and in the Āmgācchi inscription of Vīgrahapāla III we read of fine cloth embossed with lustrous gems. In diverse contexts there is mention of fine cotton and silk. Numerous sources, such as Kautilya's Arthasāstra and the Greek Periplus, the Arab Sulemān in the ninth century, the Venetian Marco Polo in the thirteenth century and the Chinese Ma-huan in the fifteenth century all testified that Bengal was renowned

throughout India and abroad for its variety of fine cloth. In the fourteenth century the poet Sekharācārya Jyotirīśvara of Tīrabhukti or Tirhut mentioned among various kinds of linen (paṭṭāmbara) Bengal's megha-

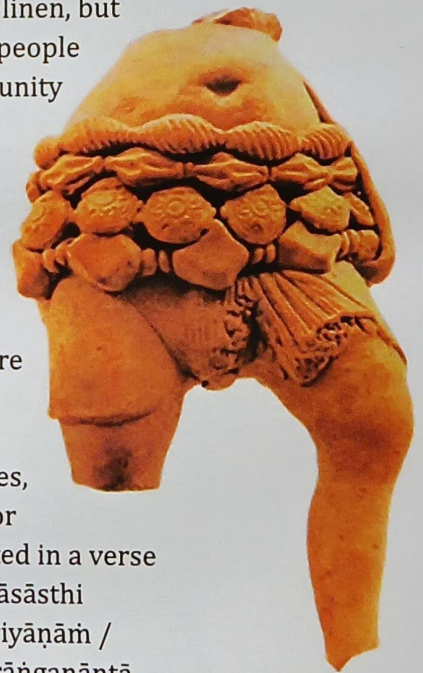
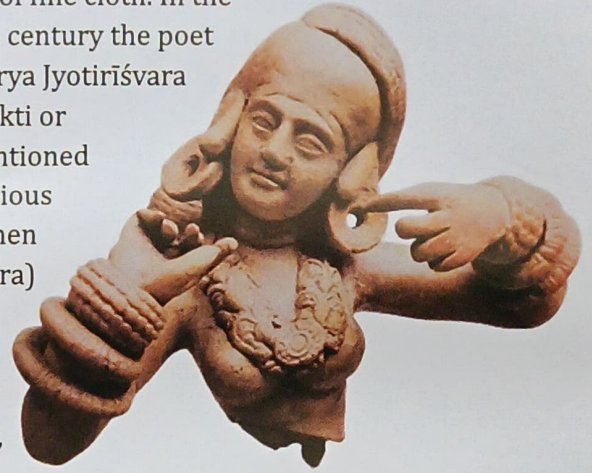
udumbara,

gangāsāgara, gāṅgor, lakṣmīvilāsa, dvārabāsinī and śīlhaṭi. These fabrics were likely fine linen, but the poor and ordinary people lacked both the opportunity and resources to wear such cloth. They were

only provided with rough, plain cotton cloth, which, in many cases, had become torn and worn out over time. Probably only girls wore the fine cotton cloth, and that many of them spun the yarn for that cloth themselves, especially the women of poor Brāhmaṇa homes, is intimated in a verse by the poet Subhāṅka (kārpāsāsthi pracayanicitā nirdhanaśrotriyaṇām / yeṣām vatyā pravatatakuṭiprāṅgaṇāntā vabhūvaḥ / tatsaudhānāmparisarabhūbi tvatprāsādādīdānīm / krīṛāyuddhacchidurayuvatīhāramuktāḥ patanti).

Jewellery & Ornaments

From the antiquities and the contemporary literature of the Old Bengali period it is evident that

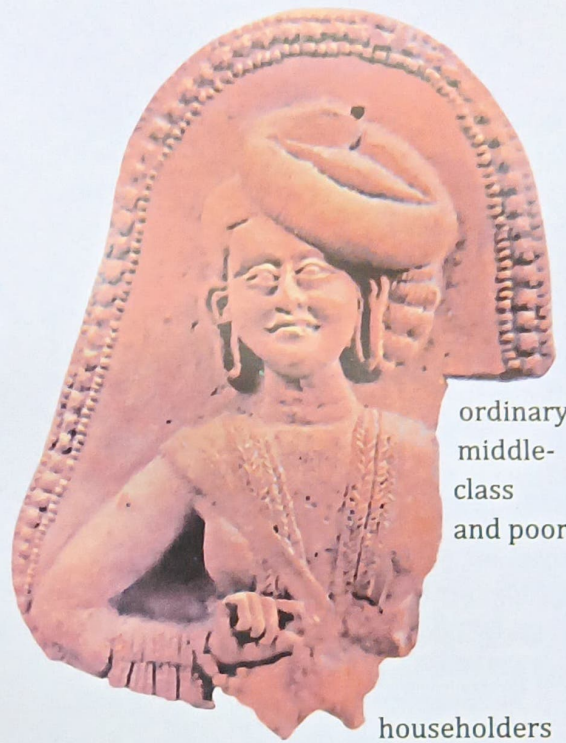


Terracotta plaques from Chandraketugarh showing Jewellery & Ornaments of ancient Bengali people. Image source: Haque, 2001





ornaments like ear pendants and rings, rings for the fingers, necklaces, bracelets, armlets and ornamental girdles were worn by both Bengali men and women alike. Women, probably married women, wore especially conch bangles. In Vijayasena's Naihaṭi inscription there is mention of pearl-studded necklaces and garlands of red and blue beads, and we learn from the Deopara eulogy that the wives of the servants of the royal household wore nose-rings,



ordinary middle-class and poor

householders who, at best, had to be content with conch bangles, ear ornaments of fresh palm shoots, and flower garlands.



ear-rings, garlands, anklets and gold bracelets. According to the Naihaṭi inscription, the girls of the royal family wore necklaces studded with pearls, and in the Rāmacarita we read of many beautiful ornaments embossed with diamonds and of ankle bells encrusted with gemstones, pearls, emeralds, sapphires and

rubies. There were also gold and silver ornaments. Needless to say, all these luxurious adornments were beyond the reach of the



Terracotta plaques from Chandraketugarh showing Jewellery & Ornaments of ancient Bengali people. Image source: Haque, 2001

In the *Naiṣadhacarita* there are some descriptions of how upper-class girls were dressed and adorned for their weddings. First of all, in accordance with family tradition, married women—both with sons and without—bathed the girl, *Damayantī*, while singing songs of benediction, and then decked her in white linen. Her friends then put a spot of realgar on her forehead together with a spot of gold, painted her eyes with collyrium, put two jewels in her ears, lac on her lips, a seven-stringed pearl necklace about her neck, conch and gold bangles on her wrists and lac on her feet. Familiar with the propitiatory rituals of a wedding the women of the inner apartments upheld the scriptural wifely rules in accordance with the regional customs, and the men and the *Brāhmaṇas* performed the acts cited in the *Vedas* and the *Smṛtis*. The place for the wedding was festively decorated by the girls, and the streets and the quays of the town were arrayed in flowers of coloured cloth made by artisans, and pictures were painted over the walls of the house. The chief musical instruments were the flute, *viṇā*, cymbals and tom-tom. As part of the propitiatory ritual banana trees were planted on either side of the main door of the house. As is still the custom, the bridal chamber was stealthily subjected to eavesdropping (*sakautukāgāramagāt purandhribhiḥ sahasra randhrokr̥tamīkṣitumtuḥ. Adhāt sahasrākṣatanutramitratām adhiṣṭitam yat khalu jiṣṇunāmunā.*) and a corner of the bride's *śāṛi* was tied to a corner of the groom's scarf. From this description of the wedding of *Nala* and *Damayantī* it appears that the groom and his party stayed on in the bridal house for four or even five days after the marriage.

Body Colour

There are snippets of information here and there regarding dress and decoration, such as the statement by *Bharatamuni* in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* (probably third century) that the women of *Gauṛa* had their hair curled on top, and their braids hung free (*gauṛīnām alakaprāyaṁ saśikhāpāśaveṇikam*). In the same work there is some hint about the complexion of the ancient Bengalis: 'The complexion of all the *Saka*, *Yavana*, *Pahlava* and *Vāhlika* north Indian characters of the drama is fair; the inhabitants of *Pañcāla*, *Śūrasena*, *Uḍra*, *Magadha* and *Aṅga*, *Vaṅga* and *Kaliṅga* must be of a dark complexion.' (*śakāśca yavanāścaiva pahlavā bahlikādayaḥ / prāyeṇagaurāḥ kartyavyā uttarāṁ ye śritādisama / pāñcālāḥ śūrasenāśca tathā caivoḍramāgadhāḥ / aṅgavaṅgakaliṅgāstu śyāmā kāryāstu varṇataḥ*) *Rājaśekhara* in his *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* comments—*tatra paurastyānām śyāmovarṇaḥ dākṣiṇātyānām kṛṣṇaḥ pāścātyānām pāṇḍuḥ udīcyānām gaurāḥ madhyadeśānām kṛṣṇaḥ śyāmogaurāśca*). Thus, it can be assumed that the complexion of the inhabitants of *Prācyā*, like that of those of *Gauṛa*, was generally dark, but that the complexion of the men and women of the royal families and other high-born families was very often fair, as has also been said by *Rājaśekhara*. (*viśeṣastu pūrvadeśe rājaputrādīnām gaurāḥ pāṇḍurvā varṇaḥ*)

Morality

The contemporary *Brāhmaṇical Smṛti* texts clearly show a strong effort

to improve the moral standards of society. Epigraphic evidence also reflects an intention to promote the ethical ideals found in the Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas, such as wifely devotion, purity, steadfastness, and self-control. The Prāyaścitta-prakaraṇa condemns various forms of moral decay, including sexual lust, drunkenness, theft, and adultery, and prescribes severe punishments and methods of atonement for these offenses.

Partly due to the strength of these standards, partly due to the system of the production of wealth and the way of life of the greater rural society, the general moral equilibrium of ancient Bengali life could not easily be disturbed. All the indulgence in luxury and unrestrained lustfulness were generally confined to the society of the towns; the people of the villages did not opt for such habits—indeed, they maintained a constant aversion towards them. In the greater rural society natural and simple standards were upheld. In his poem Śubhāṅka observes—

viṣayapatiralubdhā dhenubhirdhāma
pūtaṁ / katicidabhimatāyāṁ sīmni sīrā
vahanti / śithilayati ca bhāryā nāttheyī
saparyāma / iti sukṛtīmanena vyañjitaṁ
naḥ phalena. (the local administrator
is without lust, cows make the home
austere, cultivation is abundant, the
homemaker never feels fatigued while
attending the guests—by all these)

Religious Practices and Festivals

As is true in other places, caste, class and clan influenced religious thought and practice in Bengal also, but never was there anywhere a common belief for all levels of society. Furthermore, no belief, practice or ritual of worship ever gained immediate currency in society, but rather evolved over a long period of reflection and observance. Implicit within the development of society there is a very long history of the relations between the devotion, beliefs and rituals of the various sects, communities and social strata, and throughout its evolution that history periodically was revised in accordance with contemporary social thought and consciousness and the class patterns of the time. Certain class and communal beliefs and practices were not always limited to their respective groups. Due to interactions between different sections of society, the ideas and practices of one group would be adopted by others to varying extents, leading to the development of new rituals and ceremonies. The group with greater spiritual and material power would play a more influential role in shaping the religious practices of other sections, while also being influenced by them. These complex interactions led to ongoing syntheses. Indian society and

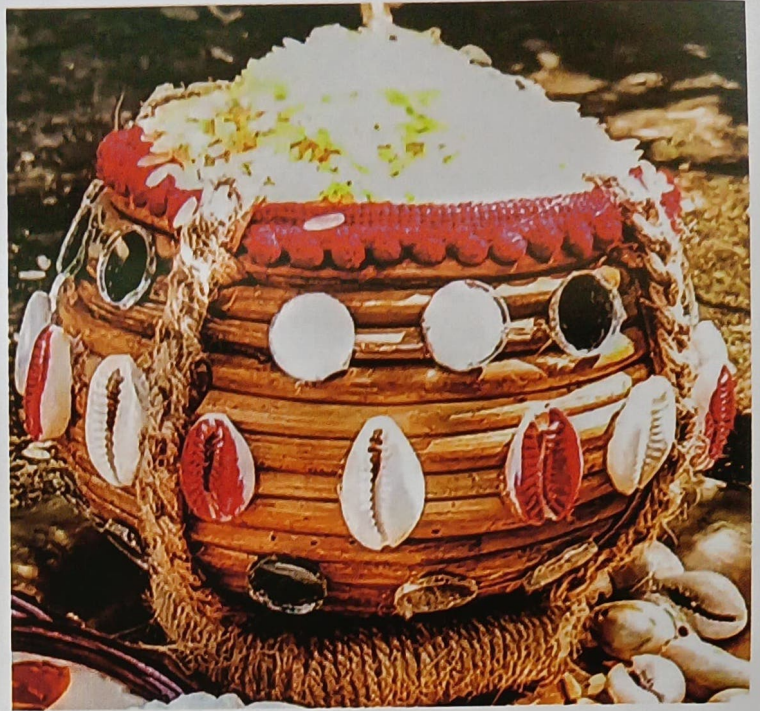
Umā-Maheśvara,
Bangladesh National
Museum. Image Source:
Haque, Enamul / Adalbert
J. Gail, 2008.



culture, in its entirety, can be seen as a fusion of Aryan practices with those of pre-Aryan and non-Aryan traditions. In Bengal, during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, this synthesis began, with Aryan religions becoming a dominant force. In medieval times, assimilation became an integral part of the social mindset, a process that continues subtly to this day.

The earliest history of Bengali religious practices was that of the reverence and worship, observances and beliefs of the original inhabitants of the different settlements of Bengal. It is generally accepted that the religious practices, funeral rites, such beliefs and ceremonies as those pertaining to marriage, birth and death, the form and concept of the various deities and restrictions regarding impurity incurred in food and enjoyment to be found among the Aryan Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist and Jaina communities were a legacy from those earlier people. Especially the Hindu theory of rebirth, spiritualism and theories of metaphysics, reverence for ancestors and the offering of oblations to them, and many funeral and pre-nuptial rituals, so much a part of our lives and the lives of many of our neighbours are derived from those inhabitants.

The aborigines of India, like those of other countries, ascribed divinity to certain trees, stones, hills, fruits, flowers, beasts, birds and places, and offered worship to them. Indeed, this is still true of such tribes as the Khāsiyās, Muṇḍās, Santals, Rājbaṁśīs, Bunos and Śavaras. In Bengal, especially in the villages, worship of trees, particularly tulsī, seorā and the banyan, is still very popular among the girls of Brāhmaṇical society. In many



ceremonies of worship and the taking of vows a branch of a tree is planted and worship is offered to it along with the accepted deities of Brāhmaṇism.

Essential elements in all Bengali propitiatory rituals are a pitcher of fresh mango sprigs and the worship of a banana plant dressed as a bride, and at many avowal ceremonies one of the requirements is a bunch of paddies. These are all aboriginal legacies. The festival of eating the new autumn rice (navānna) and its concomitant ceremonies popular amongst Bengalis, the avowal ceremonies taken by our girls and, indeed, many of our daily religious practices are connected with the religious beliefs and observances of the earliest peoples and tribes of Bengal. Still bearing relation to the religious, social and cultural ceremonies of various localities are auspicious articles of benison such as rice, bunches of paddies, paddy grain and grass, as well as bananas, turmeric, betel, pān, coconut, vermilion, banana trees,

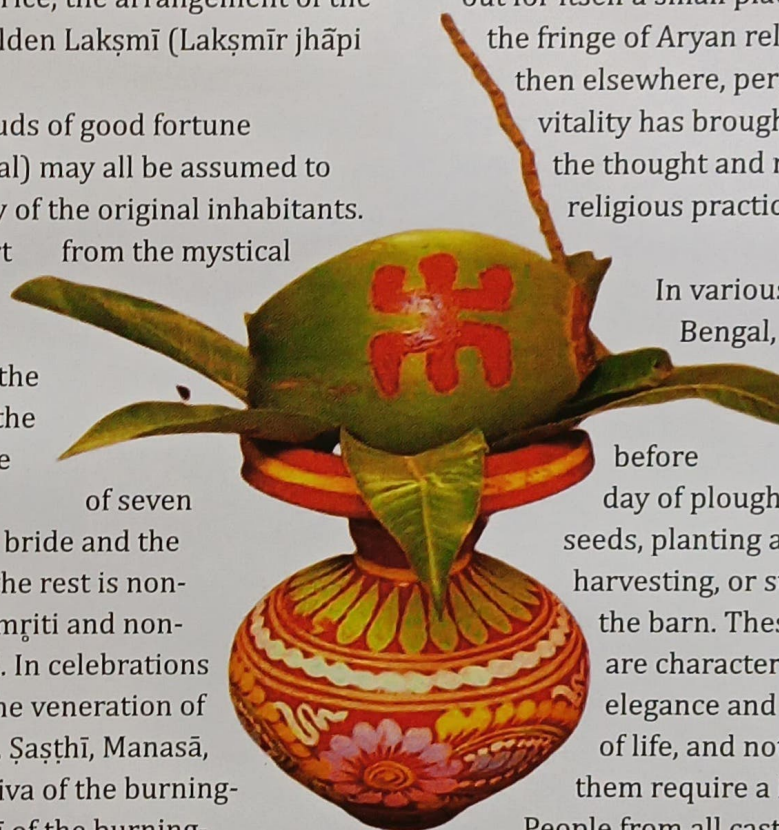
pots (some with symbols painted on them), various kinds of decoration, cow dung, cowries and so on. Indeed, much of what is aesthetically pleasing in Bengali ceremonial tradition is related to the observances and culture of those early people. At weddings, especially in eastern Bengal, the betel leaf cones of pān, the daubing of the bride and groom with turmeric and their subsequent bathing, the playing of draughts, the scattering of rice and cowries by the married women, the parched rice, the arrangement of the basket of Golden Lakṣmī (Lakṣmīr jhāpi sthāpanā)

and the cuds of good fortune (dadhimaṅgal) may all be assumed to be the legacy of the original inhabitants. Indeed, apart from the mystical parts of the

ceremony—the bestowal of the bride and the ritual walk of seven paces by the bride and the groom—all the rest is non-Vedic, non-Smṛiti and non-Brāhmaṇical. In celebrations of worship the veneration of Ghaṭalakṣmī, Ṣaṣṭhī, Manasā, Liṅga-Yoni, Śiva of the burning-grounds, Kālī of the burning-grounds, Bhairava and others, have for the most part been basically derived from aboriginal religious practices and have survived with very little change in form or nature. Many of these rituals and ceremonies are rooted in the earliest reverence, wonder and belief of rustic peasant society.

Concealed behind the Aryan exterior in the practices of Brāhmaṇism, Buddhism

and Jainism, there is a religious and cultural life extending to the depths of the Bengali people and into every corner of the village cottages, the householders' courtyards, the peasants' plots, the fields of harvest, and the temple pavilions and the public meeting places of the rural communities. In some places it has been suppressed to the point of being stifled or eradicated, leaving behind only an inanimate skeleton, but in other places its own innate strength has lent it to carve out for itself a small place of its own on the fringe of Aryan religious life. And then elsewhere, perhaps, its own vitality has brought change to both the thought and nature of Aryan religious practice.



In various regions of Bengal, specific rituals are still observed before the first day of ploughing, sowing seeds, planting autumn rice, harvesting, or stacking crops in the barn. These ceremonies are characterized by artistic elegance and a celebration of life, and notably, none of them require a Brāhmaṇ priest.

People from all castes are welcome to take part in these festivals and rituals. At the heart of these traditions, especially around the autumn rice-eating ceremony, the first fruit of a new season, or the harvest, lies the same ancient instinct that continues to guide the Bengalis. Not only in the lives of the peasants but in the lives of the artisans too, we see still in vogue on special days religious festivals celebrating the blacksmith's forge, the potter's wheel, the weaver's loom, the

farmer's plough and the tools of the carpenters and masons. Something of that in an Aryanized, reformed character, is to be seen in our Viśvakarmā (the celestial architect) worship. Like the peasants' festivals, the celebrations of the artisans had no need for a Brāhmaṇ priest either. The veneration of productive implements is very closely connected with the procreational rituals of the aborigines. Indeed, central to this rustic peasant and artisan aspect of the religious life of the Bengali people is great joy in the creative endeavour together with the manifest beauties and graces of the artistic realm.

Even today in rural Bengal, outside the boundary of the village, a place called a thān or sthāna is defined. Animals and birds are sacrificed to the thān, whether there is an image of a deity there or not. The villagers make



vows in its name and offer it reverential devotion, yet it is significant that it has no place inside the village. Local deities are not known everywhere by the same name or in the same form; in contemporary Bengal, one may be known somewhere as Kālī and somewhere else as Bhairava or Bhairavī, somewhere as Banadurgā or Caṇḍī and somewhere else by some local name or other. But whatever name it is known by, it is everywhere a deity of the devotion of the ancient, pre-Aryan village communities. Aryan Brāhmaṇical culture was not very sympathetic to any of these rustic deities of the aboriginal people, and their worship was forbidden by Brāhmaṇical proscription.

Indeed, Manu repeatedly described the worshippers of these deities as degenerate, but no prohibition could ever prevent their worship. Some of these deities were gradually accepted by Brāhmaṇical society and were absorbed into Brāhmaṇical religious practice. Sītālā, Manasā, Banadurgā, Śaṣṭhī, various forms of Caṇḍī, the crematoria-frequenting Kālī with her necklace of human skulls, Śiva of the burning-grounds, Parṇaśavarī, Jāṅgulī and other such non-Aryan, rustic deities, it would seem, thus gained acceptance in the religious

practices of Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism. Various kinds of flag ceremonies and festivals—celebrating such emblems as Indra, Garuṇa: the bird, Mīna: the fish, the peacock and the monkey—were popular in ancient Bengal. Govardhanācārya recorded that the worship of the śakra, or banner, of Indra was current prior to the eleventh century. There is also some mention of the śakrotthāna or śakra banner in the Kālaviveka of Jīmūtavāhana. Also, amongst the princely men of ancient India there was no shortage of names designating the emblems of copper, the peacock, the swan, and others (tāmradhvaja, mayūradhvaja, haṁsadhvaja). Certain tribes or communities had banners bearing the emblems of particular animals or birds, and the worship of these emblems was characteristic of the particular communities that bore them and by which those communities were known. Worship of such banners evolved from the ancient bird and animal ceremonies (Paśupakṣipūjā), which probably survived in the iconography of many subsequent Brāhmaṇical and Purāṇic deities. We may note in this regard the mounts of our various gods and goddesses: Durgā's mount is the lion, Kārtika's is the peacock, Viṣṇu's is the bird Garuṇa, Śiva's is the bull Nandī, Lakṣmī's is the owl, Sarasvatī's is the swan, Gangā rides the horned shark and Yamunā is mounted on the tortoise. There can hardly be any doubt that these birds and animals which still merit our



Top: Kārtikeya

Right: Viṣṇu on Garuḍa, Varendra Research Museum. Image Source: Haque, Enamul / Adalbert J. Gail, 2008.

practices of Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism. Various kinds of flag ceremonies and festivals—celebrating such emblems as Indra, Garuṇa: the bird, Mīna: the fish, the peacock and the monkey—were popular in ancient Bengal. Govardhanācārya recorded that the worship of the śakra, or banner, of Indra was current prior to the eleventh century. There is also some mention of the śakrotthāna or śakra banner in the Kālaviveka of Jīmūtavāhana. Also, amongst the princely men of ancient India there was no shortage of names designating the emblems of copper, the peacock, the swan, and others (tāmradhvaja, mayūradhvaja,



worship in association with Brāhmaṇical deities derive from the early tribal bird and animal ceremonies. Along with idol worship, the bird and animal banner ceremonies are deeply rooted in ancient traditions. In fact, it can be said that among aboriginal tribes such as the Sāntāls, Muṇḍās, Khasiyās, Rājbaṁśīs, Gāros, and the so-called low-born Bengalis, these emblem and banner ceremonies are the primary forms of religious observance.

Tree worship, the worship of various kinds of mother goddess, the worship of gods of the fields and the worship of diverse anthropomorphic deities and demigods were pursued in places beyond the outskirts of the village, and these developed as places of pilgrimage

in various parts of Bengal. In the earliest literature of the Bengali people there are some descriptions of the worship of tree divinities as well as anthropomorphic deities. Various kinds of deities were connected with agriculture. The deity of the sugar-grinding machine was famous by the name Puṇḍāsura (or Puṇḍrāsura). Puṇḍra (or Puṇḍra) was a type of sugarcane, hence the name Puṇḍravardhana, which was another name for Bengal. Celebration of this Puṇḍāsura is still current in northern and western Bengal, where he is known by the name of Paṛāsara (which is Sanskritized as Parāśara).

Like the ceremonies of the emblems or banners, various kinds of yātrās (journeys of the gods) were another major type of celebration among the aboriginal tribes of Bengal. Such yātrās as the chariot, bathing and swing festivals originated with them and in time came to be Aryanized. Descriptions of such yātrās in popular

religious festivals and of the travelling, singing and dancing parties connected with social religious ceremonies, can be found in Kautilya's Arthaśāstra and in the ancient Buddhist Saṃyuttanikāya. The people of upper class Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist societies did not really approve of these kinds of social celebrations and yātrās. Asoka actually promulgated decrees against them, but no royal edict could suppress the popular expression of folk religion. From the Kālaviveka something can be learned of such yātrās as the bathing yātrā (snānayātrā) that were current in Bengal.

Vrata celebrations played a significant role in the daily religious life of the Bengali people, with a history that is both complex and ancient. It is likely that these practices date back to the pre-Vedic aboriginal communities. One might speculate that those who practiced these ascetic rituals, viewed by Aryan Brāhmaṇical society as "fallen,"

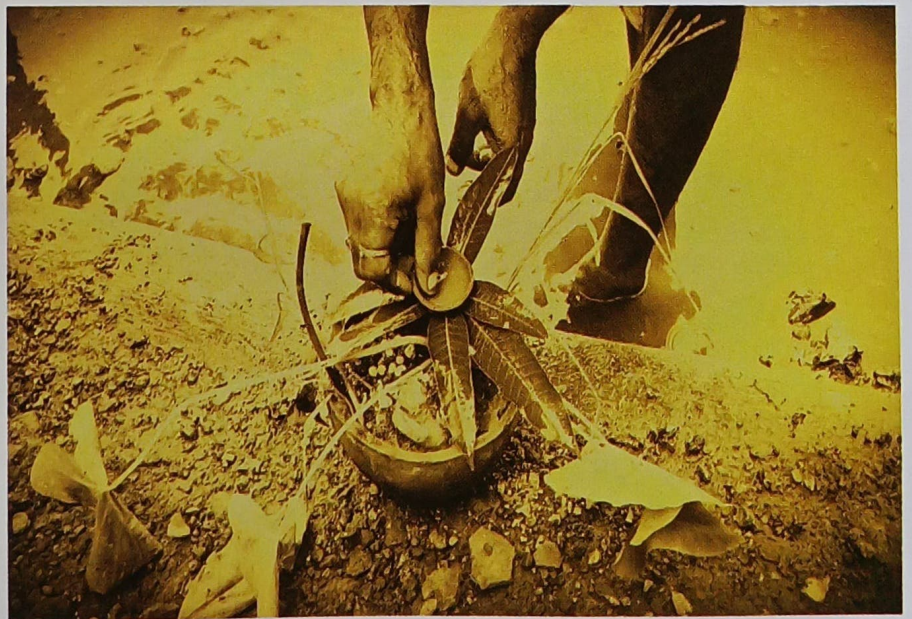
were regarded as degenerate. It is difficult to assert conclusively a relationship between vrata and vrātya. The Ṛgvedic Aryans were observers of sacrifice; distinct from them, observing vrata and believing in its implicit magical powers were those,



perhaps, known as vrātya. In this context it is worth remembering that these vrātyas were connected with the eastern region, and it is also noteworthy that the extent of vrata practice is the greatest in Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Odisha. Perhaps the word vrata means 'to conceal' or 'to demarcate'. The purpose of vrata was to select, and the word for 'selection'—varaṇa—is a synonym for vrata. The site of a vrata ritual was adorned and marked off by decoration or a circular boundary. The drawing of the boundary and the selection of the site and its markings were pervaded with magical beliefs. There still remain traces of respect for magic in the rites of married women practised at weddings in our country, such as the various hand or finger gestures before the face of the groom, the placing of a winnowing tray (kulo) decorated with lamps in the arms of the groom, and the touching of the chest and forehead while uttering verses of welcome. The purpose of this welcoming is to remove the man from the influence of harmful power and to segregate and conceal him from such. An examination of these rites reveals a similarity between vrata and varaṇa, and it is quite clear that originally, they were connected with magic. It is significant that only women were entitled to perform vrata and varaṇa ceremonies.

interpretations of cultural anthropology are gradually making it clear that most of the vratas still practised in our rural society, especially among the women, are non-Vedic, non-Smṛti, non-Purāṇic and non-Brāhmaṇical. These are basically related to the secret magical procreational ritual so much a part of rustic society. From the Ṛgveda on, there is no mention of current vratas anywhere in the ancient scriptures, and it is quite clear that neither ancient Buddhism nor Brāhmaṇism accepted this religious ritual. The positive attitude of Aryan Brāhmaṇism towards vrata probably developed a short time before the compilation of such major Purāṇs, as the Viṣṇu, Matsya and Agni Purāṇas, for it is in these texts that we see the approval of Brāhmaṇism extending to the many and popular vratus as well as Brāhmaṇas officiating in such non-Vedic, non-Smṛti rituals. Throughout the entire ancient and medieval era in Bengal many non-Vedic, non-Smṛti and non-Purāṇic vrata gradually achieved the recognition and respect of Brāhmaṇism. Such vratas proffered the need for a Brāhmaṇ priest;

Right : Person
performing Itupūjā

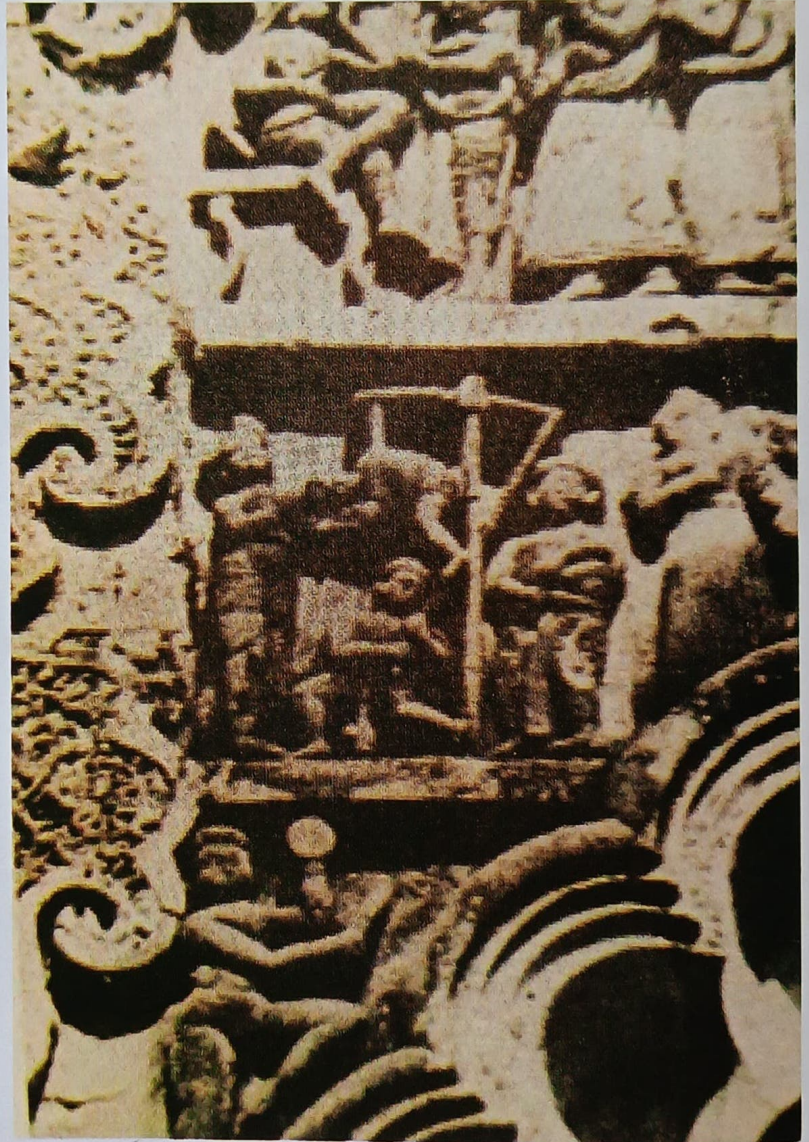


The

those that did not achieve Brāhmaṇical respect and recognition had no such need and the women of the house continued to perform the ceremonies. Our rural social life has been animated throughout the year by the celebration of these various vratas which occupy a very important place in the religious life of the Bengali people. Following are the names of few of the vratas observed in Bengal even today: puṇyapukur, śivapūjā, campācandana, pṛthvīpūjā, gokāla, aśvatthapaṭa, haricaraṇa, madhusaṁkrānti, guptadhana, dhāngochāno, yācā pān, thoyāthuyi, raṇe eyovrata, daśputul, sandhyāmaṇi, tejodarpaṇa and vasundharā, all celebrated in the first month of the Bengali year; jayamaṅgala, celebrated in the second month of the Bengali year; bhāduri and tilakūjāri, celebrated in the fifth month of the Bengali year; kulakulaṭi and itupūjā, celebrated in the seventh month of the Bengali year; yamapukur, sējuti, tuṣātuṣli, celebrated in the eighth month of the Bengali year; tāraṇa and māghamaṇḍala, celebrated in the tenth month of the Bengali year; itukumāra, vasantarāya and uttamaṭhākura, sasapātā, celebrated in the eleventh month of the Bengali year; nakhachuṭa, celebrated in the twelfth month of the Bengali year. There are also many vratas, performed in the homes of the Bengali people, which originally were current among the aboriginal tribes as ceremonies of occult and fertility power. Having been recognized by Brāhmaṇism, many of these auspicious ceremonies found a place in the almanac, such as the vratas of Śaṣṭhī, Maṅgalaṇḍī and Suvacanī. From the Smṛti literature of ancient Bengal we may glean a list of the vratas current in ancient times and accepted by Brāhmaṇism: sukhārātri (performed in

the seventh month of the Bengali year), pāṣāṇ-caturdaśī (performed in the eighth month of the Bengali year), dūta-pratipad (performed during the full-moon of the eighth month of the Bengali year), kojāgar-pūrṇimā (performed in the sixth month of the Bengali year), bhrātr̥dvitīyā (performed in the seventh month of the Bengali year), ākāś-pradīp (performed in the seventh month of the Bengali year), akṣaya-tṛtīyā, aśokāṣṭamī, etc. Reference to these vratas can be found in Jītmūtavāhana's Kālaviveka. Jītmūtavāhana speaks also about the Janmāṣṭamī festival (celebration of the birth of Kṛṣṇa) and

Below: Terracotta plaque showing Charak festival, from Gopinath-Jiu temple, Radhakantapur, Medinipur. Image Source: Haque, 2014



the ritual bath. The form of these rituals had been developed and refined from the ancient tribal rituals. There are also vratas which, in relation to the patterns of the ancient tribal society, can be seen to be lately-created vratas. All the lunar festivals under the auspices of the lunar days and the stars have been basically influenced to some extent by the non-Bengali Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇs (noted for their interest in astrology).

In addition to vratas there are at least two religious ceremonies of the lower levels of Bengali society whose extent and influence are quite pervasive and which are fundamentally non-Vedic, non-Smṛti, non-Purāṇic and non-Brāhmanical. One is the festival of Dharmathākūr and the other is the Caitra-Çaṛaka festival on the last day of the year (the last month of the Bengali calendar: mid-March to mid-April). The Gambhīrā festival of the Māldaha region or the Śiva festival of other parts of Bengal are variant forms of the Çaṛaka festival. Both the Caitra Çaṛaka festival and the Dharmathākūr festival have two main elements: the decoration of the house and the dance with the emblem or image of Kālī.

Until recently, Dharmathākūr was believed to be a deity of Buddhist tradition. However, recent research has revealed that Dharmathākūr originally belonged to the pre-Aryan aboriginal tribes and later evolved through a fusion with various Vedic and Purāṇic deities. The main officiants at the Dharma festival are still the Ḍoms, though today priests from other communities, such as the Kaivartas, Śūṛis, Bāgdis, and Dhopās, also lead the ceremonies. The Dharma festival has been, and remains, particularly

significant in the Rāṛha region. In some areas, however, Dharmathākūr has been assimilated into Śiva or Viṣṇu worship and is now venerated with the help of Brāhmaṇa priests. The worship of Dharmathākūr involved offerings of cakes and wine, with the chant, "I would offer a pond of wine and a mound of cakes" (*madyer puṣkariṇī diba piṣṭer jāṅgāl*). The festival's dance featured a corpse and a human skull. According to the Sūṇya Purāṇa, Dharmathākūr has no physical form, and the object of worship was a stone shaped like a tortoise, on which a symbol of a clog was drawn. It is clear that Dharmathākūr began as a pre-Aryan or non-Aryan deity and later merged with figures like Varuṇa, the chariot-borne Sūrya, the Purāṇic tortoise avatar, and Kalki, the final incarnation of Viṣṇu, ultimately taking the form of Dharmathākūr. His worship is especially concentrated in the Rāṛha region. Suniti Kumar Chatterji suggests that the word dharma might be a Sanskrit version of an ancient Austric term. Additionally, dharma is part of the Buddhist trinity—Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—indicating that the worship of Dharma, and the Dharma festival itself, have roots in the religious practices of the primitive aboriginal tribes.

What is true of the Dharma festival also applies to the Caitra Nil festival, or Çaṛak. The Çaṛak festival now is closely connected with Śiva. The focus of the festival is the icon installed in a vessel of water; the icon is the Śiva Liṅga and the devotees call it 'Old Siva' (*buṛo śiva*). The priests of this festival are usually Brāhmaṇ ācāryas or astrologers, and it is well known that according to Brāhmaṇical law the latter are fallen Brāhmaṇs. Worship of crocodiles,

swinging over blazing coals, jumping over thorns and knives, piercing the flesh with arrows, swinging from the Caṛak tree, the fire dance and the marriage of Śiva, and the worship of the demon or monster, dāno barāṇo or hājarā pūjā, are all special features of the Caṛak festival. The worship of bārāno or hājarā usually takes place at the burning ground and involved in this ritual are a burnt śola fish and the story of its rebirth (reminiscent of the tale of King Śrīvatsa in the Mahābhārata), and the Caṛak clowns (similar to those of Calcutta's Jelepārā, who acted as social critics, in song and dance). In Bengali society still the celebrants of the Caṛak festival are normally of the classes unfit to offer water. From the point of view of cultural anthropology both the Dharma and Caṛak festivals are based on the ancient tribal society's beliefs in demonology and rebirth, and it was in the hope of the rebirth of the dead of each tribe that the rituals were annually performed. Furthermore, such elements of the Caṛak festival as piercing with arrows, the intentional acceptance of physical pain and bloodletting have their origins in the custom of human sacrifice in the very early aboriginal society. The Dharma festival has the same origins; in its ritual there is the sacrificial offering of a kid goat, an Aryan Brāhmaṇical modification of the earlier human sacrifice. Given the authenticity of the Sūnya Purāṇa of Rāmāiṇḍit, it can be accepted that the Dharma festival was current in Sena times prior to the Turkish conquest.

The Holi or Holāka festival is part of the same tradition as the Dharma and Caṛak festivals. The Holāka festival is mentioned in the Dāyabhāga of

Jīmūtavāhana, and there is evidence that it was celebrated in Bengal before the twelfth century. Cultural anthropological studies have explored the various rituals and celebrations associated with Holi in Bengal, particularly on the last day of the light fortnight and the full moon day of Phālguna (the eleventh month of the Bengali calendar, which falls between mid-February and mid-March). It is now established that Holi was initially a rural celebration in the hope and entreaty for a good harvest. Its main features were human sacrifice and erotic song and dance; in time, human sacrifice came to be replaced by animal sacrifice, and the oblation of fire and ghee was included. But the celebrations principally connected with Holi are those of the festival of the god of love—Vasanta, Madana or Kāma—the playful swing of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and, in some places, the lampooning of a buffoon king with various kinds of fraud, deceit and jest. From the third or fourth century to the sixteenth, a festival called the Vasanta or Madana or Kāma was ongoing throughout north India. Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra (third or fourth century), the play Mālatimādhava (eighth century), Al-Beruṇi (eleventh century), Jīmūtavāhana's Kālaviveka (twelfth century) and Raghunandana (sixteenth century) all speak of this festival. It would seem that sometime after the sixteenth century the Caitra Vasanta, Madana or Kāma festival became one with the Phālgun Holā or Holak festival. The Muslim rulers and nobility, together with the ladies of the harem, were great patrons of the Holi festival, and perhaps it is as a result of their patronage that the Madana festival gradually came to be subsumed by the Holi festival. But the history of the swing-play of Rādhā

and Kṛṣṇa is in different ways connected with Holī. Our earliest knowledge of the swing festival is from an inscription of Rāmagaraguha (third or second century BC). However, that was not the swing of any deity but probably that of an actual human being. The participants—both men and women—enjoyed the swing festival, more so as it involved the children. Yaśodā, the foster mother of Kṛṣṇa, used to swing the boy Kṛṣṇa or Bālagopāla. In subsequent festivals not only the boy Kṛṣṇa, but also Rādhā, his companion in youthful sport, appeared on the swing, and prior to the thirteenth century the playing on the swing of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa was looked on as a religious celebration all over India. From the

testimony of Al-Berūnī it would seem that this festival was observed in the month of Caitra, as is also suggested by the Garuḍa Purāṇa, and the Padma Purāṇa. At some subsequent time, the festival was brought forward to the full moon day in Phālgun and became one with Holi. The ancient agricultural festival, which involved sacrifices, songs, and dances, eventually evolved into the modern Holi celebration. In present-day India, the Holī or Holāka

festival is still considered by some to be a Śūdra (lower-caste) festival. In many regions, the fire for Holi is even sourced from the homes of the untouchables.

In the rainy season throughout India there is a custom amongst widows of observing a practice called Ambuvācī. For either three or seven days they take no cooked food, do not dig the ground or burn a fire, and do no cooking or preparation of food—indeed, no such thing as would disturb the earth. The popular belief is that these few days are the menstrual period of Mother Earth, during which no part of her may be hurt. This belief and the practice of Ambuvācī were part of the procreational rituals of the early tribal society and part of its religious thought.

I have offered only a few indication³ of the non-Aryan, non-Brāhmaṇical belief and ritual of the aboriginal tribal society relating to various aspects of the religious practices and ceremonies of the Bengali Hindus. But before moving on from this, something should be said of some of the Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical deities which had their origins in the thoughts and customs of this early society. In this regard no mention is made of such deities as the Brāhmaṇical Śiva and Śivaliṅga, the goddess of the mother cult—Durgā, Kālī or Karālī—the gods Nārāyaṇa-Śīla, Gaṇeśa and Bhairava or the Buddhist Jambhala, Hārītī, Ekajaṭā, Nairātmā, Bhṛkuṭi and others; the history of all these deities, and of many others is intimately connected with the beliefs and practices of the aboriginal tribal society. I mention here only a few Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical deities with clear origins in tribal society and whose worship is particularly popular in east India.

Below : Cāmundā from Rampal, Munsiganj , Bangladesh



In Bengal, the worship of the goddess Manasā today is not strictly idolatrous, although it remains highly popular. The worship of Manasā is closely connected to the Manasā poems from medieval Bengal, and while she is often represented in forms that are not idol-like, such as on fertile ground adorned with snakes or depicted on cloth or sponge-wood, there is iconographic evidence suggesting that she was venerated as an idol in Bengal before the eleventh century. The Purāṇic legend, which tells of Manasā's rise to prominence in society, is well known in Bengal. The snake, symbolizing procreative power, plays a central role in her worship, which likely evolved from ancient tribal practices that revered fertility. In many depictions of the goddess in Bengal, she is shown with a child amidst coils of snakes, alongside symbols like fruit and a pitcher of water, all representing procreative vitality. Archaeological findings indicate that during the early Pāla period, Manasā began to be incorporated into the broader Brahmanical religious practices. The Mahābhārata and the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa reveal that there was no established Vedic or Purāṇic tradition for the goddess Manasā. Similar to Manasā, there is a widespread snake goddess worship in southern India, particularly among the Telugu and Kannada-speaking people, where a goddess called Mañcāmmā is venerated, and the story of the snake-goddess Ambābaru mirrors that of Manasā. It is plausible that Mañcāmmā is the southern counterpart of Manasā, with Ambābaru being associated with the latter's narrative. Historical evidence also confirms that the worship of Manasā was practiced in Bengal during

the reigns of the Sena and Varmaṇa dynasties.

Mention must be made of Jāṅgulī, a Buddhist deity in the form of a jungle-dwelling Śavara princess. Like Manasā, this vīṇā-playing goddess relieves snake poisoning, and it should be remembered that one of the forms of the Vedic Sarasvatī was also as a Śavara's daughter and a curer of snake poisoning. Based on this similarity it was imagined in later times that Jāṅgulī, like Manasā, was similar to the Vedic Sarasvatī. In fact, she was said to be the same goddess as the

Below: Paṇṣābarī, Bangladesh National Museum. Image Source: Haque, Enamul / Adalbert J. Gail, 2008.



Brāhmaṇical Manasā. There is very clear evidence of the extensiveness of the worship of Manasā in the Kālaviveka.

Parṇasavarī is one of the Vajrayāna Buddhist goddesses who is very closely related to the pre-Aryan, pre-Brāhmaṇical Śavaras. She is depicted dressed in a tiger's skin and the leaves of trees; she is youthful, and wears an ear ornament of lightning. Devotees would meditate on her strength as the slayer of witches, ghouls and pestilence. There is no doubt that originally, she was the revered goddess of the Śavaras and later, after she had gradually gained acceptance into the Aryan religion, she was known as 'the goddess of all the Śavaras' (sarvasavarānām bhagavatī). Several of the songs of the Caryāgīti provide evidence that Śavaras had a special place in the practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism.

ūcā ūcā pābata tāhī basahi sabarī bālī
moraṅgī pīccha parahīṇa sabarī gibata guñjarī mālī
umata sabaro pāgala sabaro mā kara gulī guhārā tohori
nitya ghariṇī name sahaja sundarī
nānā tarubara mauulila re gaaṇata lāgelī ḍālī
ekelī sabarī e baṇa higuī karṇakuṇḍalabajradhārī
tiadhāu khāṭa pāṛilā sabaro mahāsukhe seji chāilī
sabaro bhujaṅga nairāmaṇi dārī pehmarāti pohāilī
hia tābolā mahāsuhe kāpura khāi
suna nairāmaṇi kaṇṭhe laiṇā mahāsuhe rāti pohāi
gurubāk pucchia bindha niamaṇa bāṇe
eke śara sandhāne bindhaha
bindhaha paramāṇa bāṇe
umata sabaro garuā roṣe
umata-sihara sandhi paisante
sabaro lobhira kaise.

Right :

Mahīṣāsūramardīnī on
the temple of Illumbazar,
India. Image Source:
Haque, 2014

In east India remnants of the very old and extensive culture of the Śavaras are clearly evident in various forms. On the numerous terracotta plaques of the Pāhāṛpur temple aspects of the daily life of the Śavara men and women are depicted in such a way that it would seem that they were intimately involved in the life of the general public. In various parts of Bengal, such as northern and south western Vaṅga, the Śavaras were, in the course of time, incorporated into the lower levels of Hindu society. In the Kālaviveka and the later Kālikā Purāṇa there are lengthy descriptions of a festival called the Śavarotsava, held on the tenth



day of the autumn festival of Durgā. In this festival the people, like Śavaras, would wrap their naked bodies in the leaves of trees and smear mud all over themselves and, clapping in and out of time in wild enthusiasm, would sing various erotic songs, dance and beat drums.

In Bengal, the goddess Manasā is worshipped in two ways: through the veneration of her image and through the worship of a pot adorned with her image. Similarly, a few other goddesses in Bengal are worshipped in comparable manners. In contrast, the specific worship of the goddess Lakṣmī in India is not very common and has had less prominence compared to the widespread influence of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. But we are acquainted in another way with Lakṣmī in our popular religion, a form of her worship very popular amongst the women of Bengali society. This Lakṣmī is a creation of the rural imagination, Lakṣmī being a goddess of harvest abundance and prosperity and she is worshipped in the form of a pot depicting an abundance of paddy. If the practice of this worship is examined in connection with the vrata stories and the Purāṇic tales, it will easily be understood that this popular conception of Lakṣmī gradually evolved into the Purāṇic form of the goddess. At the autumn full moon of Aśvin (the sixth month of the Bengali calendar) worship of Lakṣmī begins and it is not unreasonable to say that, that too was originally the worship of this aboriginal goddess. Indeed, up to the twelfth century there was no relation between the autumn full moon festival and the worship of the goddess Lakṣmī.

The worship of the goddess Śaṣṭhī follows a similar pattern. There is no

tradition of image worship for Śaṣṭhī in Brahmanism, and in Buddhist



Left : Gaja-Lakṣmī,
Bangladesh National
Museum. Image Source:
Haque, Enamul /
Adalbert J. Gail, 2008.

iconography and ritual, she is likely represented as the goddess Hārītī. The stories surrounding the birth of Hārītī, found in texts such as the Mahāvastu, the Vinayapiṭaka of the Sarvāstivādī, the Chinese Sūtrapīṭaka's Saṃjuktaratnasūtra, and Kṣemendra's Bodhisattvāvadān Kalpalatā, suggest that the concept of Śaṣṭhī's birth is closely tied to that of Hārītī, with both deities rooted in the belief in procreative power and the prevention of pestilence. While the worship of Hārītī's image was

widespread in Buddhist practices, Śaṣṭhī has never been worshipped in this way. Her devotion remains largely confined to female devotees, with her worship focused on prayers for children and the well-being of infants. Over time, the focus on the pestilence-preventing powers of Śaṣṭhī and Hārītī has evolved into the veneration of Śītalā, the goddess of smallpox, who is often depicted riding a donkey.

It is not surprising to note that most of the popular local rituals practiced by Bengali women, as well as the common Aryan Brahmanical ceremonies, are inherited from pre-Aryan tribal society. Beliefs in demonology, reincarnation, the attribution of divine power to symbols of fertility and occult forces, and the idea that these powers could influence both good and evil were all integral to the worldview of that society. There is little doubt that elements of pre-Aryan tribal beliefs also influenced funeral practices and ancestral rites. For example, rituals like the immersion of a bull's tethering pole during funerals, the daily offering of boiled rice and ghee to crows, and the tradition of offering food to the ancestors' spirits all have their origins in neighboring tribes such as the Śavaras, Pulindas, Kirātas, Santāls, Mundās, Kolas, and Bhīls. The practice of honoring and commemorating ancestors at the start of blessing and propitiatory rituals also stems from these tribal traditions.

It was on this most ancient religious thought and practice that Bengal's Vedic and Purāṇic Brāhmaṇism and non-Vedic Buddhism and Jainism were based and propagated.

Sculpture

In terms of ancient Bengal's sculpture, very few examples exist from before the sixth or seventh century. The scarcity of such works can be attributed to several factors, including the region's soil and climate, the lack of suitable stone, and the absence of thorough archaeological excavations. However, the primary reason lies in historical



circumstances. The full influence of Aryan culture had not yet reached Bengal before the fifth or sixth century, and there was little direct connection with central India, the heart of that culture. Prior to this, the ancient tribal regions of Rāḍha, Puṇḍra, Suhma, Vaṅga, and others, with their own distinct social systems, arts, and ways of life, remained on the fringes of Bhāratvarṣa (the Indian subcontinent) and were largely ignored or looked down upon by the Aryans. The materials used by these tribes for their art—such as earth, straw, bamboo, or at most, timber—were not

Right : Gupta terracotta piece, mutilated head of a figure. Image Source: Haque, 2001

durable, and whatever has survived the ravages of time and nature has largely disappeared. However, the spirit and tradition of these people have endured. While stone sculpture was practiced in India during the Maurya period or even earlier, this craft did not reach Bengal or become widespread there until several centuries later. A few pieces of pre-Gupta sculpture have been found in Bengal, but the majority are made of terracotta or small fragments of stone. These works do not display distinct regional styles; instead, they clearly reflect the influence of contemporary central Indian artistic traditions. Much like other cultural aspects, these early examples of sculpture mark the beginning of the spread of central Indian Aryan civilization into

Pāṭaliputra to Mathurā. Most of the pieces are figures of young men and women, especially women, and there are some figures of children too; there are also some, heads, some of children, some of adults. In many of them there is clear evidence of Greek and Roman features in the heads, faces and bodies, as well as in the treatment of the hair and the ornamentation of the heads. There is also no doubt that ceramic work was common, and of course the depiction of various stories and legends was frequent. However, the few terracotta plaques obtained from such ancient sites of Bengal as Pokharna in Bankura district, Tāmralipti and Mahāsthān cannot really be said to belong to this descriptive type, but are related to the heavily ornamented, young, vivacious and self-aware female

figures mentioned earlier. Their bodies are embellished and buxom, yet well-proportioned; their hair is prolific and treated in various forms and fashions; youthful and sensual features are extensive and pronounced; fixity and fluidity are both portrayed consciously and conventionally; and the dress is plain, yet well-arranged in accordance with the taste of the times. These female figures represent a special level of north Indian civilization and culture. In

taste and in practice the naivety of the ancient tribal mind had not passed away, while the figures were animated by the financial prosperity and the atmosphere of the society which produced them, by its physical youthfulness and beauty, its decorative



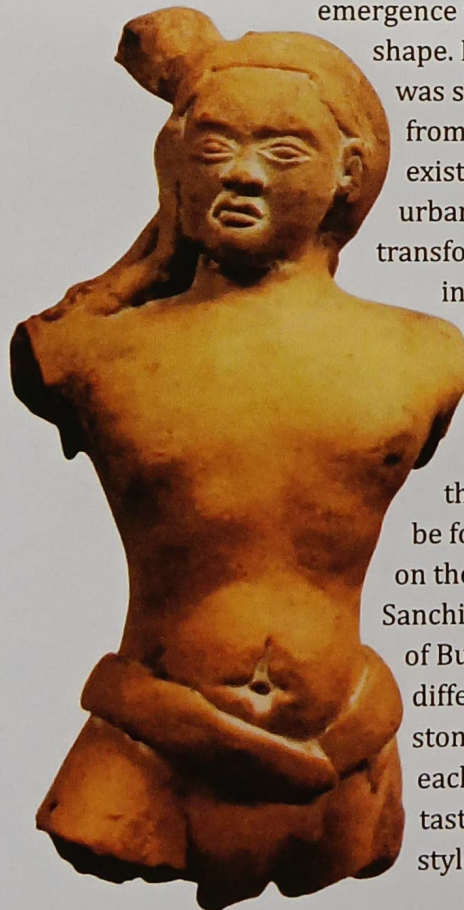
Left :Terracotta plaque from Chandraketugarh showing young man and woman. Image source: Haque, 2001

Bengal.

From the second century BC to the second or third century AD an art style in terracotta was current throughout the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley and central India and many examples of this style have been discovered at various places from

splendour and sensual appeal. It is clear that these figures could not have been representations of a simple, rustic society, as they lack the straightforwardness and unadorned beauty typical of such a lifestyle. Even among the female figures on the plaques that decorate the wall surrounding the stone stūpa at Bharhut, despite their elaborate attire, intricate ornaments, and lavish hairstyles, there is a sense of restrained passivity, an impersonal detachment, and an almost anxious stillness. This reflects the long-lasting artistic standards of the period. In terms of physical appearance, clothing, and ornamentation, these figures seem to belong to the Śuṅga period or perhaps slightly later. The depictions of urban life in Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra* suggest that a refined, sophisticated urban upper class, wealthy from trade, had not yet fully developed, though its

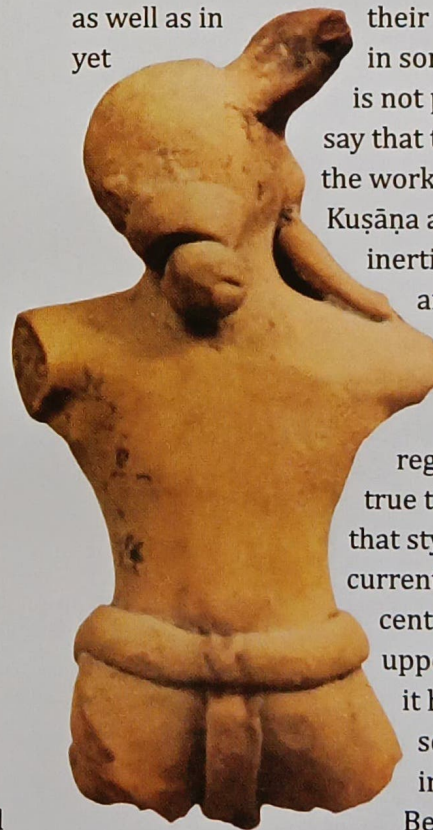
Terracotta plaque from Chandraketugarh. Image source: Haque, 2001



emergence was beginning to take shape. Essentially, the society was slowly transitioning from a simple rural existence to a flourishing urban one. Evidence of this transformation can be seen in the many terracotta plaques, particularly those depicting female figures. A similar reflection of this evolving society can be found in the plaques on the main portal of the Sanchi Stūpa, on the walls of Buddhagayā, and in a different style on some stone walls in Mathurā. In each of these cases, the taste is more refined, the style more aristocratic, and

the craftsmanship more skilled. The few terracotta plaques found in Bengal bear a strong resemblance to those discovered at sites such as Kauśāmbī, Pāṭaliputra, and Vasāra from the first century BC and the first century AD.

Besides these terracotta plaques, a limited number of stone figures of Kuṣāṇa styles have been found in Bengal; it is significant that they are all from northern Vāṅga and were not made from the red sandstone of Mathurā, the centre of the Kuṣāṇa style of art. Among them are two images of Sūrya and one of Viṣṇu, three figures that are of the same kind in proportion, structure, line and form. In spite of the comparative plainness of technique and artistry, it is undeniable that they are to some extent related to the marble depictions of the Kuṣāṇa and, possibly, Scythian kings of Mathurā. This relationship is very clear in the shape and nature of the dress of the three figures as well as in their artistry. And yet in some ways it is not possible to say that they were the work of Scythian-Kuṣāṇa artists, for the inertia of the body and the rustic, unadorned appearance are quite regional. It is true that when that style of art was current among the central Indian upper classes, it had at least some mild impact on Bengal, and in



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these figures, there are some signs

of the style having been influenced by regional form and taste. Moreover, some Kuṣāṇa coins have been found in Bengal, so it is not surprising that in the Bengali art of this period there should be some degree of influence of the Scythian-Kuṣāṇa artists.

On a few small terracotta plaques found among the ruins of Vāṅgaṛ in Dinājpur district there are some very clear features of the artistic style of Mathurā and of the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley in general during the Gupta period. The Vāṅgaṛ plaques do not reflect the feeling of vitality and the nobility of the physical appeal of the Mathurā female figures, although the broad ornamental girdle, the full rounded breasts and the abundance of ornaments in the accoutrement of the women are quite in accordance with the central Indian trend, and in this respect, they are the descendants of the women depicted in the plaques of Mahāsthān, Pokharnā and Tāmralipti mentioned earlier. Yet in the female figures of Vāṅgaṛ both contemporary and later trends are equally perceptible, and are revealed in the even shape of the downward-pointing rounded breasts, the finely formed limbs, the relative smoothness of execution and their notable grace. Here there is a faint presage of the stylistic standards of the Gupta period.

The natural maturation of the Scythian and Kuṣāṇa style of Mathurā can be seen in the sculptural style of the Gupta period, when the principal centre of the fine arts was at Sāranātha. The strong and weighty Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of Mathurā, thoroughly down to earth and lacking in fineness, gradually developed into the Buddha, Bodhisattva and Viṣṇu figures of the Gupta era fine, elegant and slender, engaged in meditation or absorbed in yoga. The profound and extensive history of the thought and creative endeavour of India as a whole is entrenched in this transformation.

In the east the influence of Sāranātha extended as far as Tejpur and Āssām. Undoubtedly this river of influence also flowed over Bengal, but the number of contemporary figures found here has not been very great. There are quite obvious echoes of fifth and sixth century Sāranātha in a lime and sandstone statue of the Buddha found in Bihāraila village; the even, refined, feminine shape of this figure, the gentle grace of its pose and its tranquil, meditative intent show it to be a legacy of the contemporary central Gangetic civilization and culture.

Characteristic of the Sāranātha style is the simple, restrained and refined manifestation of profound meditation bliss, of enlightenment and gratification. In



ultimate
supreme

Bust of Lord Viṣṇu from Bengal, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

Terracotta sculpture
of Lord Sūrya from
Mahasthangarh



this respect the Bihārila statue may be regarded as a regional form of the Sāranātha style, albeit a little less fine and delicate.

The eastern form of the Sāranātha style is perceptible in the bronze Buddha of Sultāngañj and the figures of the Mañiyāra temple of Rājagīr; a form to some extent discernible in the Sūrya figures found at Deorā village in Bogra district. The muscular waistlines of these presumably sixth-century statues, their economy of ornamentation, their clearly restrained simplicity of design and their radiant haloes are indicative of Gupta conventions and characteristics, but in the tepidity of their fleshly bodies the eastern appeal to corporal elegance is equally perceptible.

A sense of refined taste and spiritual awareness can be seen in a Surya statue discovered in Sunderban-Kāśīpur, although the distinct eastern regional characteristics of the Gupta style are less apparent in this piece than in other sculptures from Bengal. The Kāśīpur Surya is likely older than the Deorā statue, yet it stands out for its greater elegance in form, more profound vision,

and a stronger sense of gentleness and subtlety.

Similarly, a bronze Mañjuśrī statue, gilded with gold leaf, found in the ruins of the Valāidhāpa Stūpa, clearly demonstrates the eastern emphasis on emotional depth and warmth in form. The way the dress molds to the body, the restrained use of ornamentation, and the simplicity of style all closely align with the eastern Gupta artistic tradition. Another significant example is a Cakrapuruṣa figure from Mālār village in Murshidabad, which also exhibits eastern Gupta style through its shape, structure, and proportions.

It is evident that the general characteristics of fifth and sixth-century Bengali sculpture closely resemble the artistic features of northern Gangetic India. The influence of the Sāranātha style is unmistakable, but there is also a noticeable presence of emotion and other eastern regional elements. Interestingly, most of the few regional Gupta-style sculptures from Bengal of this period have been found in northern Vanga or ancient Puṇḍravardhana.

The creativity of northern India during the third and fourth centuries, exemplified by the monumental works of Mathurā and Buddhagayā, reached a mature phase in the fifth century with masterpieces at Sāranātha, Udaygiri, and Mathurā. This period produced some of the most exquisite and spiritually profound sculptures, which are considered rare not only in Indian art but in world sculpture. Sāranātha, in particular, represented the pinnacle of this classical art form. However, from

the second half of the sixth century onward, north Indian sculpture began to show signs of diminished vitality, a trend that became more pronounced in the seventh century. Meanwhile, a new artistic inspiration was emerging, though it is unclear what sources influenced the development of this new style.

From the first century AD people from various parts of Central Asia came to seek refuge in India: the first wave brought the Yueh, Ch'i, Scythians and Kuṣāṇas, the second—in the second and third centuries—brought the Ābhīras, and in the fifth and sixth centuries the third wave brought the Huṇas. Amongst each influx were the bearers of a particular culture. Nevertheless, at heart the old Indian styles and standards were being transformed—at least, there is miscellaneous evidence that this was so as far as art and daily life styles were concerned—and from the eighth Century the signs of this development gradually became apparent in sculpture, murals and other fine arts. Furthermore, from the seventh century a close connection was established between Nepal and Tibet and central and eastern India. From the eighth century some of the influence of the ancient Kirāta or Boḍo culture could be seen. From the seventh and eighth centuries the regional popular culture, as a result of the increasing effectiveness of classical culture, manifested itself to the extent of eclipsing the art of the upper classes. This also marked the demise of the classical era and the commencement of the medieval. No particular political event initiated the medieval era, nor any particular date. Rather, it was marked off by the nature and standards of civilization and culture, of state and society. The middleages were marked by ideas

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Terracotta sculpture
of Lord Sūrya from
Mahastha Bronze image
of Sarvāṇī ngarh

expanded and nurtured in subsequent times.

A few idols have been found in Bengal dating from the very outset of this transformation (approximately seventh century). Of them three metal figures are worthy of note. One is an image of the goddess Sarvāṇī, made of the eight metals, inscribed with the name of Prabhāvatī, the queen of Devakharga, and found at Deulbāri village in Tripurā district. The second, found in the same village, is quite small, and depicts Sūrya seated on a chariot drawn by seven horses. The third is a bronze image of a standing Śiva, found at Maṇirhāt in the

district of Twenty-four Parganas. In these three examples the development in the forms of fifth and sixth century Gupta sculpture seen in later times is quite apparent. The Sarvāṇi figure's design and form, its erect and inert posture and the proportioning of its frame clearly foreshadow the later Pāla art. Virtually the same can be said for the small Sūrya figure too. Some signs of Gupta features are still preserved in the shape and artistry of the Śiva figure, but it reveals no remnant of the fine and lucid lustre of the Gupta period. The golden age of Gupta art was in decline, and in the subsequent Pala period a new style and ideal of form would be introduced.

A few examples of the eastern Indian sculpture style, as well as works that influenced it, can be found on the plinth of the Pāhāṛpur Temple. However, the art of Pāhāṛpur is significant for several other reasons. The sculptures of this Buddhist monastery and temple offer a comprehensive reflection of Bengal's culture over at least two centuries. The monastery and temple were built in the mid-eighth century under the patronage of Dharmapāla, but it is likely that a Brahmanical temple had already existed at the site before, and some of its sculptures were incorporated into

the plinth of the later Buddhist structure. The walls at various levels of the temple were adorned with numerous terracotta plaques, while the plinth itself was richly decorated with stone panels.

These plaques of the monastery and temple walls of Pāhāṛpur are a marvel of art history. Besides Pāhāṛpur, from the ruins of Mainamati too, numerous ceramic plaques of the same kind have been discovered. There is no doubt that the walls of other large, ancient temple-monasteries were adorned with similar plaques. The character of the ceramic plaques of Pāhāṛpur and Mainamati is quite secular, and in general they reflect the popular rustic life. Collectively they recreate the atmosphere of ordinary daily life, and on looking at these numerous rows of serially ordered plaques it would seem as though the secular life moved in wonderful procession and that the sculptors moved continually from one experience of the everyday world to another. On any level of the traditional,

religious art of the upper classes it would be very difficult to find such a broad social scenario, such an immense variety of human thought and feeling, such a deep intimacy with the actual events and experiences of everyday life, such an exuberance of posture and movement, or such a lively and orderly manner of exposition. These



Terracotta Panel from
Paharpur Temple. Image
Source: Haque, 2007.

poor rustic sculptors had a profound awareness of the broad canvas of man and nature, and their work dearly reveals their reverential absorption in life. However, the same genuine and vibrant acquaintance with the secular life of the Bengali society of the times is not to be found in the stone images.

The plaques exhibit little polish, refinement, or subtlety in their execution. What stands out, however, is their natural fluidity, unrestrained energy, and the artists' keen awareness of the form, movement, and nature of both animals and humans. They also show a remarkable attention to the small details of everyday life and the material world. This objective, vivid portrayal is something new and noteworthy. There is no reason to believe that this art was connected to traditional iconography; rather, it was likely a form of popular art, created by ordinary people. In ancient India, clay modeling was considered a crude craft, belonging to the common folk and outside the realm of refined upper-class culture. It was not part of the established artistic traditions outlined in treatises or practiced in the grand temples and monasteries of the time.

It is clear that secular ceramic sculpture was well-established even earlier, capturing the fleeting thoughts and imaginations of everyday people. It seems that this art form continues to be deeply rooted in the secular life of rural communities today, just as it was in the past. The prominence of this type of art at Pāhārpur and Mainamati can be attributed to Bengal's scarcity of stone and the strong influence of popular culture. However, for many centuries

after the eighth and ninth centuries, no examples of this folk art appear to have survived. It wasn't until much later, when a centralized government in Bengal supported a different religion and culture, and the cultural link between the state and the royal court weakened, that the influence of popular religion and culture began to resurface. From the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, there is evidence of a revival and growing recognition of this popular art form.

There are very few examples of stone sculpture in Bengal prior to the Pāla period, the chief reason being the much easier accessibility of clay. It is characteristic of malleable clay that by simple, quick manipulation by the fingers and palm, various shapes and styles easily take form and the structure is just as easily refined. As a result of working in this medium Bengali popular art developed many of its own peculiar features. Thus, when all these artists, under the influence of central India, came to turn their hands to work in stone, they faced, naturally enough, a few initial problems. And yet, through this confrontation with difficulty, new styles were created in which the fluidity, vivacity and refined shape of ceramic sculpture were on one hand carried over into stone work, but by the same token—due in turn to working in stone—harsh solidity became prominent in the form and style of the bodies. However, the style and method matured in time and developed into the eastern sculptural style and tradition of the mid-Pāla period.

Nearly all the statues from the seventh and eighth centuries found across Bengal indicate that they were created as representations of deities for

worship, with their form and proportions strictly following the rules outlined in iconographic texts. The images at Pāhārpur, however, were not specifically intended for worship; they were likely designed to decorate the walls and plinths. Despite this, the guidelines of iconology were still considered, though less strictly. Since these images were meant for decoration, there was no requirement for additional elements like haloes or radiant marks behind the heads, which were common in statues intended for regular worship. In the sanctuary, on the other hand, haloes and backgrounds were necessary for images used in formal worship; this was driven both by an artistic desire for beauty and by adherence to scriptural instructions.

From the second to the sixth or seventh century, there was a unified approach to Indian art, with a shared vision of universal sovereignty over all of India, which influenced the arts as well. However, by the end of the seventh century, India's political and cultural landscape began to change. The dominance of large, centralized empires gave way to smaller local states and regional powers, and this shift in political consciousness soon affected the cultural sphere. As a result, the pan-Indian artistic standards began

to be set aside, though regional styles and forms that developed from them persisted.

The medieval characteristics started to emerge very clearly with the advent of the Pāla Dynasty in Bengal and Bihar. Although the Pālas were Buddhists, their kings were indeed protective of Brāhmaṇism and its culture, and both Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist enterprises and institutions enjoyed their patronage. Most of the populace, in fact, were adherents of Brāhmaṇism. It is difficult to determine the extent of royal patronage behind the artistic endeavours of the Pāla period, but there is little room for doubt that the wealthy gave active support.

In the Sena period there was a change in the attitude of the dynasty and the nobility. On looking at the Sanskrit literature nurtured by the royal court at this time it is clear that in the court and upper-class society there was an excess of opulence and that pomp and grandeur and a fondness for splendour had grown unrestrained. These trends are also reflected in the sculpture of the Sena period, where in composition and bodily posture there is an excessive sensory appeal and in shape and artistry there is an attraction towards sensuality. It would seem, therefore, that the taste and opinion of palace and nobility were particularly



Stone sculpture of
Pārśvanātha.

influential in the sculpture of this period.

Basically, the art of these four or five centuries was inspired by the sanction of the Buddhist, Jaina and Brāhmaṇical scriptures, as well as the combined and integrated knowledge and expertise of the different religious communities. In the Buddhist, Jaina and Brāhmaṇical images of the period the scripturally determined forms of each religion are evident. But whereas from the point of view of iconological dictates there is some degree of difference between the Buddhist, Jaina and Brāhmaṇical images, there is none from an artistic point of view; in all cases the artistic style and ideals were the same. Figures were sculpted

according to current artistic custom and standard, scriptural direction and the general tradition of artistic style, and the ideas and artistic expertise of the artist were contained within that framework.

Artists in Bengal were generally from the lower strata of society, and their work was regarded as belonging to a lower social order. In the *Prāyaścittaprakaraṇa*, Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa listed several occupations forbidden to Brāhmaṇs, including those of dancers, actors, sculptors, painters, decorators, goldsmiths, and blacksmiths.

Tāranātha mentions two notable artists from this period, Dhīmān and his son Viṭapāla, who are credited with establishing a school of sculpture, metal iconography, and painting. However, apart from a few sculptors whose names are recorded on stone panels and copper plates, no other artists are known from this era, with most artists being recognized more for their craftsmanship

than for their names.

The art of Bengal during these four or five centuries was primarily supported by specific patronages. These included: (i) the royal court, vassals, and nobility, (ii) religious leaders and their ideologies, (iii) classes and castes under the influence of certain religious communities, and (iv) artisan guilds and families. It is evident that art in this period was primarily a privilege of the wealthy, priestly, and elite classes, and reflected their thoughts and values, with little involvement from the common people.

In terms of materials, most sculptures from the Pāla and Sena periods were made from fine or slightly coarse-grained jasper, with metal images cast in bronze or the eight metals, and some made from gold or silver. Wooden figures and decorative works were also produced.

Nearly all stone and metal sculptures from this period were set against a background panel. The use of such backgrounds can be seen in the stone panels at Pāhārpur and the Sarvāṇī image from Deulbāri, which predate the eighth century, and by the eighth century, this technique had reached a mature form. Over time, bas-reliefs became more independent of the background, though the figures often retained a flat, two-dimensional appearance. Some genuine high-relief sculptures from the twelfth century show a halo behind the head of the main figure. Initially, this halo appeared simply as a flame, but over time it became more elaborate, with the flame's decoration becoming a distinct feature in itself.

In terms of stylistic evolution, most statues were created after the eighth century, though some, such as goddess figures from Barāka and Vardhamān, a figure from Borām in Mānbhūm, and a Viṣṇu figure from Kākadīghi in Dinājpur, date to the eighth century. These figures exhibit clear traits of the contemporary Māgadhī style, characterized by stocky bodies and distinctive facial expressions. The early Pāla period also favored modest adornment and elegant proportions in the figures.

Epigraphical evidence allows for the dating of certain statues to the Pāla or Sena periods. Examples include a Viṣṇu image from the third year of Mahīpāla I's reign found in Bāghāurā, Tripura; a Gaṇeśa from the fourth year of the same king's reign; Viṣṇu and Sūrya figures from the reign of Govindacandra, a Candra king; a Sadāśiva figure from Gopāla III's reign; and a Caṇḍī image from Lakṣmaṇasena's reign found at Ḍālbāzār in Dhākā district. These inscriptions, along with their stylistic features, help to confirm the nature of contemporary Bengal art, which can also be cross-referenced with similarly dated sculptures from Bihar.

Going beyond the ideal of fleshly

elegance within a strong, sharply defined outline, the tenth century ideal was in the creation of bold, strong bodies. In the conception of the human body in this century there was in the posture and form a very clear suggestion of self-consciousness and restrained vigour illumining the entire body. It is this grand vivacity which transformed the soft fleshliness of the ninth century into the immeasurable vigour of the tenth century. Throughout the tenth century this characteristic remained in Bengali sculpture, especially in stone work, evidence of which are a figure of Ṛṣabhanātha found at Surohar village in Dinajpur, a Buddha image found in Ujānīgrām in Faridpur district, and a representation of the Varāha incarnation found in Silimpur in Bagurā district.

The tenth century was, indeed, the golden age of Bengali sculpture. The sculptural style of the eighth century was flaccid and without focus, and in the ninth century there was still a fleshly looseness although there was a clear endeavour to confine it within line. In the tenth century there was an awareness of a totality of vision, an appearance of strength in the relaxed though fleshly bodies, and a suggestion of a characteristic firmness.

Stone sculpture of
Ṛṣabhanātha.



Bodily vigour took on a touch of elegance in the eleventh century, and there was an increased predilection for bodily slenderness. These features are apparent in the Viṣṇu figure of the third year of the reign of Mahīpāla I found at Bāghāurā.

The sculpture of the twelfth century was formed and nurtured mainly by the inspiration of the artistic and social ideals of the Sena-Varmaṇa era and the reflection of totally worldly happiness and riches in sculpture is complemented by that found in the literature and other arts of the Sena and Varmaṇa courts. Despite their religious content, literature and the arts were coloured by this consciousness of mundane pleasure and sensual desire.

To some extent, of course, this worldliness in sculpture was influenced from outside of Bengal. In the southern sculpture of the times the same surfeit of temporal pleasure and excess of ornamentation are predominant. Of course, the charm, liveliness and sensual appeal seen in the sculpture of Bengal are not to be found in the southern sculpture, and it is necessary to bear in mind that these Bengali artistic qualities were inherited from the sculpture of the Pāla period.

Painting

No specimen of painting prior to the Pāla period has been found to date, but there is a suggestion in the account of Fa-hian that in the fourth century at Tāmralipti (and perhaps elsewhere in Bengal too) the art of painting was cultivated, and in the folk culture of other parts of contemporary India

painting on cloth and on mud walls was not uncommon. From the ancient literature and the treatises on art it is learnt that there was scriptural injunction to decorate with paintings the walls of temples and monasteries, and so it is not difficult to assume that, like those of other regions of India, the temples and monasteries of Bengal were so decorated. However, there is no examples of mural painting, nor of the ancient cloth or mud wall painting.

The oldest surviving examples of Bengali painting are mostly of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and they are all manuscript paintings on palm leaf or paper. Naturally, the pictures are small, but even so the special characteristics of manuscript painting: a sharp and fine linear fluency, a proportion of delicate and bold technique and some depth of conception are not lacking in these manuscript paintings. In spite of the limitation of picture space, the conceptual scope and design of these paintings is both extensive and profound, there is a lengthiness in form and extent of line and there is a broad range of colour and ornamentation. These are really characteristics of the large-scale murals. Indeed, the hallmarks of mural painting are similar to those of these manuscript paintings; the manuscript paintings are, in fact, like murals, but painted within a very small area.

To date some twenty or twenty-two painted manuscripts have been found. Only one of them is on paper (Ashutosh Painting Gallery), the picture being within parallel lines in the midst of the text; the others are all palm leaf manuscripts. Paper manuscripts indicate the earliest



use of paper in Bengal. Most of them have been found in Nepal, some in Bengal and some elsewhere, but nearly all of them were written and painted in east India, especially in Bengal, from the tenth to the twelfth century; the style of painting as well as several dated manuscripts provide evidence of this.

With only one exception they are all Buddhist and depict gods and goddesses of the Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna and Tantrayāna cults. Certain religious communities practising sexual-yogic rituals had various gods and goddesses such as Lokanātha, Tārā, Mahākāla, Amitābha, Avalokita, Maitreya, Vajrapāṇi and Ākāśagarbha—who, with their attendants, were depicted in colour and line in manuscript pictures. These pictures facilitated familiarity with

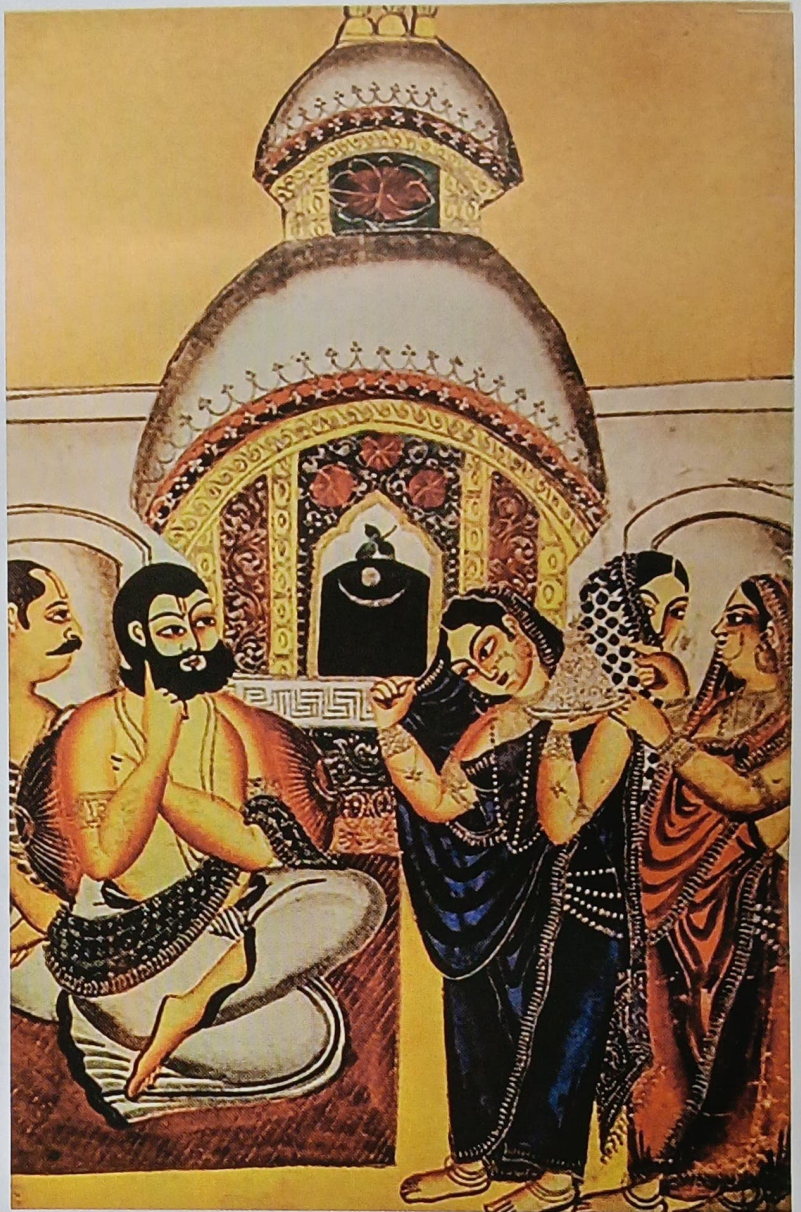
Vajrayāna and Tantrayāna practices. There are also many deities among them who are not represented in contemporary sculpture. Some pictures also illustrate Jātaka tales or episodes from the life of the Buddha. Needless to say, all these manuscripts were copied and their pictures painted with the patronage of the ruling nobility, priests and members of the wealthy classes. Thus, painting, sculpture and masonry had the same inspiration and were produced within the same social environment. Indeed, it would not really be historically false to suggest that all the contemporary paintings of Bengal, Bihār and Nepal represented the one school.

In painting, the techniques of composition were similar to many of those in sculpture. The central figure would be larger than its accompanying figures, and normally it would be standing, seated against an ornamental background or a semi-circular area of light, or standing in the porch of a temple. Other deities would be arranged in one or two rows on each side of the central figure, either in straight lines or arranged in a circular fashion. In all cases where the central figure is to one side of the composition, the attendant deities are arrayed in rows or a semi-circle on the other side. There are no large empty spaces; in such spaces as there is ornamentation with various forms such as vines or flying companions. Generally, this type of painting can be fixed as part of the creative endeavour of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a time which offers virtually no development to speak of. An examination of the pictures clearly reveals

that this technique and style of painting was a developed form of a very old tradition which had been much practised for a long time. The characteristic style and forms on the cave walls at Bāgh, Ajantā and Elorā are evident in the manuscript painting of Bengal. These pictures form an inseparable estuary of the mainstream of Indian painting and a continuing exposition of it. But by the same token, it must also be acknowledged that by the eleventh and twelfth centuries that stream had ceased to flow.

From the outward appearance as well as the essence it is quite clear that this East Indian painting was merely a manuscript depiction of contemporary iconography. Like the statues of stone or bronze of this period the pictures depict figures ornamented in the discipline of curved line, and in the outline of the body, the area of the navel and the hands and the fingers the moving waves of line are quite distinct. Pliability could be expressed in the durable substances of stone and metal, and by the device of colour it was expressed in painting. On examination of the facial types of the painted images and the stylistic treatment of the various parts of the body, it is easy to discern a familial resemblance to the stone iconography of the times.

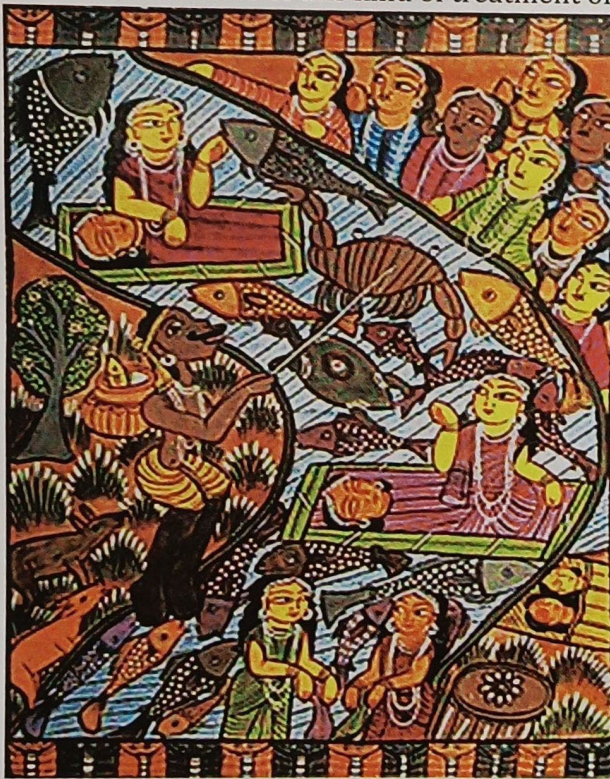
There are two aspects of this tradition: one is classical, the other is medieval. The major features of the classical aspect are colour and the richness of the fully ornamented shape of the line; the chief characteristics of the medieval aspect are the fine, free line and the thin, evenly applied paint surface. At Elorā, both these ideals are obvious, and the same is true of the eleventh and twelfth century



east Indian painting. Thus, there was an admixture of conventions and techniques.

The origin of the concept of linear dependence is in the painting of Elorā and the sculpture of contemporary Rājputānā, and the eighth century offers evidence of their mutual relationship. But the most extensive revelation of the medieval ideal was to be found in west India—especially in the region of Gujarāt—from the tenth and eleventh centuries. This movement in medieval patterns of art was not

restricted entirely to west India; there are line drawings engraved on two or three copper plates from the Sundarbans and Caṭṭagrām in Bengal. These drawings are particularly fine and with a spontaneity of line, with lines meeting harmoniously at very acute angles. There is a close stylistic relationship between this linear treatment and that of certain paintings of Elorā and the Gujarāṭī Jaina manuscript paintings. In the eleventh and twelfth century sculpture too, there are examples here and there of this kind of treatment of



line, for example, in Orissa, central India, Rājputānā and Gujarāṭ. From east India this influence extended also into Nepal and Burma.

Professor Ananda Coomaraswamy (Coomaraswamy 1927) has referred to one of the three examples of this fully matured form of copper-plate engraved line drawing of the medieval style, which

belongs to approximately the eleventh century. The second was engraved as the background of the Sundarban edict of 'Ḍommanapāla. The third, found at Mehāra village in Caṭṭagrām, is engraved in the upper part of an edict of a certain king of the Deva Dynasty. The latter two are kept in the Ashutosh Gallery in Calcutta and belong to the twelfth or thirteenth century. In both works there is the free-flowing line with its unrestrained movement. In the peripheral detail too, there is an extraordinary liveliness and profusion of line, lending no particular consistency to the subject matter. Indeed, it does not seem that this conception of line could have evolved from any profound perception or inspiration, but rather it appears that the artists had become virtually absorbed in the luxury of this fine linear fluidity; where there is no ornamentation by colour the line at the artist's own hand is the only means of producing a consistency in the subject matter. This desire is evident in the endeavour to create a fluid and lengthy curved line. In the paintings of Kolkata's Kālighaṭ paṭ, the Ajantā line technique was followed from former times until the early twentieth century, and the medieval standards were even more strongly emphasized in the rolled cloth paintings of Faridpur, Yaśohar, Medinīpur, Bākuṛā and Bīrbhūm.

Architecture

Though for want of material it is difficult to describe at much length about the houses, palaces, monasteries and temples of ancient Bengal. In the literature and the range of inscriptions from at least the fifth century there is profuse mention and prolific description

of prosperous homes, royal palaces, stūpas, monasteries, temples and so on. Fa-hian in the fifth century and Yuan-ch'uang in the seventh noted numerous stūpas, monasteries and temples throughout Bengal. The inscriptions mention various temples with ornamented floors and golden pitchers at their pinnacles. The manuscript paintings depict stūpas and temples, and in contemporary relief sculpture houses, stūpas and temples of diverse styles and appearance are carved. However, nothing remains of these buildings, except for three or four eleventh and twelfth century temples which, having withstood the trouble and strife of time, are still standing.

The causes of destruction are easy to discover. In this hot and humid country of rain-drenched alluvial soil nothing—whether timber, bamboo or brick—can endure the ravages of time for long. On top of that man's greed and lust for plunder have joined hands with nature to revel in ruination. Furthermore, malicious adherents of other religions have looted and destroyed many monasteries and temples, and there are numerous instances of some of the most ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples having been razed and then used in part as mosques, vestibules, chambers of audience and the like.

The lower and middle classes, even wealthy people, built their houses or mansions of straw, timber, bamboo and similar materials; whatever distinctions there were in size and embellishment. Although we can speak with certainty about building materials, we cannot be so sure about the nature and appearance of

these residences, but from the evidence of some terracotta plaques and stone panels some ideas can be gained. In the villages of modern Bengal there are still rectangular cottages of wood or bamboo with earthen walls or walls of woven bamboo slats. This kind of arched, two-, four- or eight-thatched house was also the ancient style of Bengali domestic architecture. Historically this style is known as the Gauṛī or Bengali style, recognized and acknowledged in later medieval architecture. Gauṛī style residences extended throughout society from the cottages of the poor to the mansions of the wealthy. Two and three-storeyed homes were also constructed in this style, with the thatch arranged on the top in an arched line. Some temples too were built in exactly the same style, and such temples have been depicted in a number of stone panels.

There were three basic types of religious buildings in ancient Bengal: the stūpa, the monastery and the temple. Stūpas and monasteries were normally connected with Jainism and, especially, Buddhism. There is only an uncertain reference to a Jaina stūpa in ancient Bengal and only one certain reference to a Jaina monastery. This monastery was at Pāhārpur in northern Vaṅga, and perhaps the stūpa was there too. All other stūpas and monasteries were constructed under the aegis of Buddhism.

In the context of religious architecture, the stūpa should be spoken of first. The stupa was, in fact, pre-Buddhist; in Vedic times a stūpa or pile of earth was heaped up in the cremation ground for the internment of the remnant bones of the dead. But the Buddhists in particular

developed this as an architectural form. In Buddhist tradition there are three kinds of stupa: (i) the *sārīr dhātu stūpa*, where the bodily remains of the Lord Buddha and his associates and disciples were kept and revered; (ii) the *paribhogik dhatu stūpa*, where objects used by the Lord Buddha were kept and revered; (iii) the *nirdeśik* or *uddeśik stūpa*, built to commemorate some place or event connected with the history of the Buddha or the Buddhist religion. In later times the stūpa became the symbol of the Buddha or of Buddhism itself. Moreover, a common way of demonstrating devotion and thanksgiving was to build stūpas of various sizes as altarage or devout offering at places of Buddhist pilgrimage; these stupas were called *nivedana stūpas* or stūpas of offering.

But whatever the type of stūpa, they were all the same in appearance, style and method of construction. Originally, to speak of a stupa meant nothing more than a half-moon-shaped structure over a rounded altar. Directly above this oval structure was a small chamber within

which a container kept the bodily remains or objects; on a holy day this container and its elements—with a procession following—would be brought down for the devotees to see. Because this container of the elements was an object of reverence and worship it had to be protected from sun and rain, and so above the chamber was an umbrella-shaped covering. As each different part of the stūpa came to be enlarged, in course of time, the size of the structure as a whole gradually increased, and a dear trend towards very high construction emerged as the portals, enclosing walls and the various embellishments became linked together. By the seventh or eighth century the lower, rounded altar had evolved as a round, enlarged platform, and its overhead container was raised, proportionately, even higher. To give greater height a raised square base beneath the altar appeared in some cases, and above the small chamber the gradually diminishing umbrellas came to give a needle-point peak to the whole structure. Thus, the original architectural characteristics of the stupa had quite

disappeared: the oval

structure came to take on the same value as the other parts and its predominance abated; the stupa became more and more removed from its original form as its various parts merged to assume the shape of an enlarged cone; Each of

Image of Triratna
stūpa of Kutila Mura at
Mainamati monastery.



the stupas of Bengal with whose ruins we are familiar was an offering stupa and belonged to the very last stage of architectural development.

In number as well as in their variety of form and appearance the few nivedana stūpas of Bengal bear little resemblance to the many nivedana stūpas on the borders of modern Bihar. In various places in Bengal there are some nivedana stūpas cast in bronze or carved from stone, but these cannot be described as typical architectural examples.

A small bronze nivedana stupa discovered in Asrafpur village is probably the oldest example of a Bengali stupa, belonging to approximately the seventh century. We know of only one nivedana stupa carved from stone, erected in Yogī Gumphā. At first sight it would seem that it should not be described as a stupa;

there is such an ascending movement through the plinth, altar, platform, container, chamber, umbrellas and so on that the structure appears as a tapering pillar with forms of the various parts of a stupa intruded into it here and there. There are some depictions of stupas in manuscript paintings, and without discussing the richness of embellishment we can say that in regard to shape and appearance these are all of the one kind. The indented rectangular plinth, the gradually built-up altar; the lotus-shaped platform, the container and the gradually diminishing umbrellas are all characteristic of these depictions.

Apparently, no new characteristics of stupa architecture were developed in Bengal, nor was there any innovative and enriching admixture, and it is not likely that there was any endeavour at stupa construction on a grand scale. In fact,



other than for the purpose of offering there was probably no relatively notable effort at anything architecturally distinct in stūpa construction in ancient Bengal and Bihār. Bengal was not attracted to the stūpa architecturally, and yet about the same time what splendour and magnificence could be seen in the stūpa construction in the Burmese capital, Pagan! There is a simple reason: the stūpa bore little significance to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. Moreover, the nivedana stūpa was not the authentic type of stūpa nor did it serve the basic purposes of a stūpa.

We will now turn our attention to monasteries. While the stūpa was a symbol of worship and an object of reverence, the monastery was the residence of the Buddhist monks and the abode of their learning and teaching, rule, discipline and compliance. The earliest Buddhist and Jaina monasteries were caves carved out of a mountain, a kind of monastery formation which is not exactly architecture as there is no constructional concept nor creative inspiration. Of course, there were also efforts to construct monasteries with a framework of bamboo or timber on a brick or stone plinth, and in those cases, there had to be an integral design: in the middle there was a large courtyard surrounded on four sides by rows of rooms, the central chamber on one side being the largest; in one corner of the courtyard were a well and a place to wash; entry to the monastery was by one door only.

A preference for grander monasteries could be noted along with the increase and expansion of the Buddhist and Jaina orders, and bricks were introduced into

the construction of those monasteries in accordance with the design of the earlier bamboo and timber monasteries. Should one storey be insufficient, monasteries were built in two or three or even up to nine storeys, and what were originally merely residences for monks became great centres of scholastic and religious endeavour. In ancient Bengal there were many monasteries, large and small, and there is some suggestion of the richness and splendour of these monasteries in Yuan-ch'uang's description of the P'o-si-p'o or Bhāsu Monastery at Puṇḍrvarḍhana and the Lo-t'o-mo-ch'ih or Raktamṛttikā Monastery at Karṇasuvarṇa.

Excavations have revealed that there were at least two monasteries at Pāhārpur. From an inscription of 478-9, it is learnt that Ācārya Guhanandī had a Jaina monastery here at Baṭa-gohālī or Goyālabhiṭā. In the second half of the eighth century the Śrīdharmapāla Great Monastery was founded at Somapur. We have no means of knowing anything about the ground plan and the form and the appearance of the Jaina monastery, but the design and the appearance of the Dharmapāla Monastery are quite evident. No such huge and splendid monastery has been discovered anywhere else in India and its appellation of 'great' is quite appropriate.

The monastery extended over a square of about nine hundred feet and was surrounded by very thick and strong exterior walls. On the inside of these walls there were rows of rooms in excess of at least one hundred and eighty, and on each side, there was a large central room. In front of rows of rooms, a very wide veranda ran all around the four sides, and

from the centre of the veranda a staircase led down into the wide courtyard, in the centre of which was a very large temple. Above the steps on the edge of the veranda was a row of columns, above which the roof was constructed. From the width of the outside walls and the close array of the rows of columns, it would seem that the monastery was more than one storey, and its overall height and grandeur can be gauged by the height and grandeur of the temple preserved in the centre. The huge rectangular monastery-cum-temple was described by Vipulaśrīmitra in the Nālandā inscription as one of the visual splendours of the world.



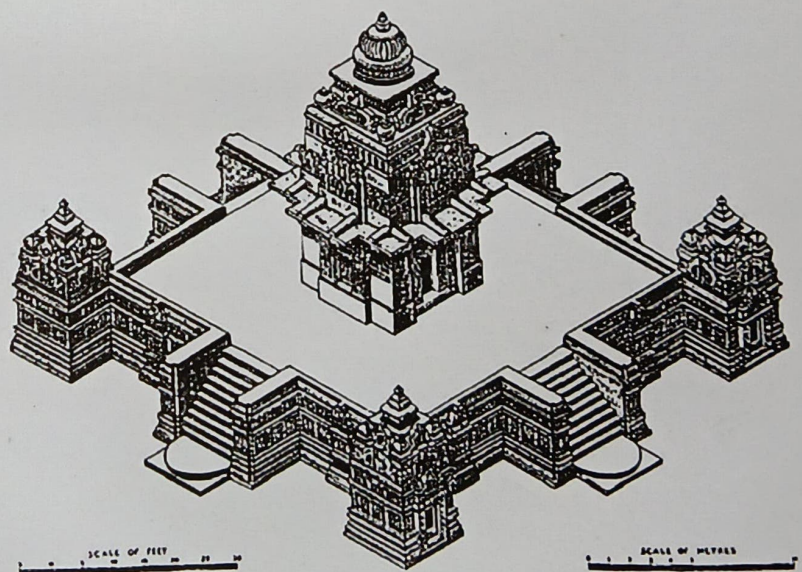
There was an office for the administration of this great monastery, and that was a chamber next to the main entrance hall. From floor to floor, room to room and courtyard to courtyard there was a very long channel carrying all the water from within the monastery to a small, deep tank. Within the rows of rooms as well as in the ample courtyard there were variously placed small temples, offertory stūpas, wells and bathing-places.

From the ruins of such large monasteries as those at Nālandā, Śrāvastī and elsewhere it would seem that they were all of the same basic

design and layout as the Pāhārpur Monastery. But there is no doubt that a monastery as rich, vast and splendidly set out as that has, to date, not been discovered anywhere else.

Of course, such a large monastery was not built in a day, and during its long life of nearly four hundred years there was more than once the need for repair and addition. However, it seems certain that whoever originally conceived this monastery's design, structure and appearance had a very clear concept of its totality, and in construction and renovation there was no violation of that concept. There is no doubt that the chambers of the monastery were originally used as residence for the monks, but from the richly embellished altars in most of the rooms it would seem that in later times the number of resident monks decreased and the rooms were perhaps used as prayer chambers.

Fig. 2 The lionomorphic reconstruction by Vas (1952, pl. V).



The "Sanyasābhāra" temple and the Vipula temple

Temple Architecture

From literature and the corpus of inscriptions we know that many temples were constructed in ancient Bengal, but apart from a few ruined or partly ruined temples of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, nothing remains of them. And yet in the history of Indian temple architecture Bengal deserved some distinction. The temples of Bengal were the basic inspiration for the temple architecture of Java and Burma. The splendour of some of the temples of Bengal is described in literature and in inscriptions, and some temples are depicted in manuscript paintings and sculpted panels, such as the Buddha temples in Rāṣa and Puṇḍravardhana, the Tārā temple in Varendrī and the Lokanātha temples in Samatāṭa, Varendrī, Nālendra, Rāṣa and Daṇḍabhukti. It can be seen from the form and appearance of the depictions of these temples that there were basically four types of temples

constructed in ancient Bengal. There is no variety of style or technique in the ground plan; indeed, in each type the scheme and layout of the ground plan are virtually the same. However, variety is effected in the section above the sanctuary, that is, the form and style of the roof or the thatch. These are

the four styles:

(i) bhadra or pīṛa temple. In this style the pyramidal roof of the sanctuary gradually tapers upward in three, five or seven stages. At the highest, smallest stage there is the crest and the emblic myrobalan, or symbol of immortality.

(ii) rekha or śikhara temple. Here the roof of the sanctuary rises straight upward in a slightly curved line in the form of a pinnacle, at the top of which are the crest and the emblic myrobalan. The rekha or śikhara temple is closely related stylistically to the temples of the cities of north India.

(iii) Stūpayukta pīṛa or bhadra temple.



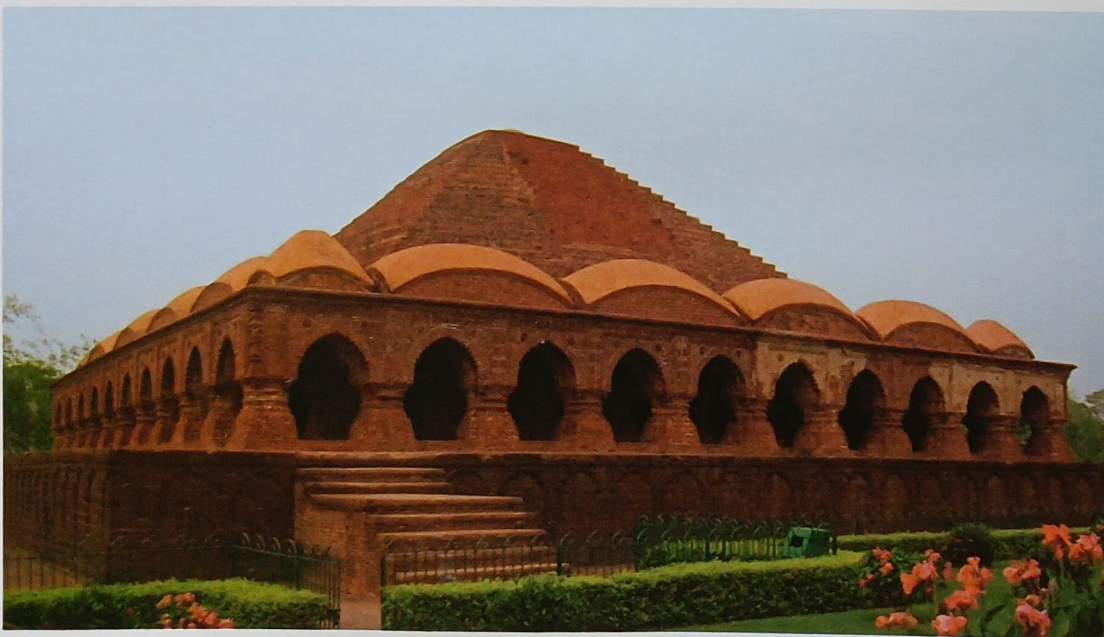
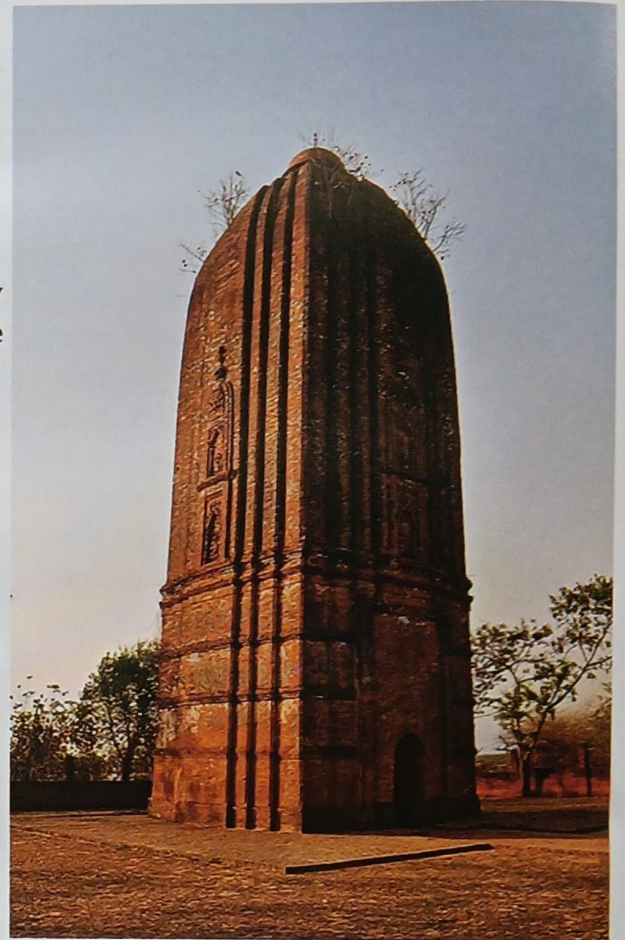
The roof of this kind of temple is a stūpa of layers in a pyramidal tapering, with a crest at the top.

(iv) Śikharayukta pīṛa or bhadra temple. Here the tapering of the roof is in a pinnacle of layers in pyramid form, with a crest on the top.

There is some suggestion in the numerous stone panels of sculptured temples that bhadra or pīṛa temples were quite prolific in ancient Bengal. The early form of this style can be seen in a seventh century bronze panel found at Asrafpur. Above four indented timber pillars are two sloping, tapering roofs, on top of each of which is a beautiful crest. This was the basic form of this style of temple, a form which gradually became more developed and complex. One by one the number of sloping rooves increased, and beneath the crest at the peak the container—like an Adam's apple—came to be replaced by the emblic myrobalan in stone, and beneath the neck, as it were, the emblem of a rampant lion ornamented each of the four comers of the roof, or the shoulder-blades. The ground plan was

usually rectangular, and an elongated line from each side to the centre gave the impression of a chariot. On such a ground plan, temples of two or more sloping roofs formed a very common style in medieval Bengal too, a style which no doubt evolved from that of the two- or three-levelled thatched roofs of Bengali houses.

The oldest example of the rekha or śikhara temple is the fourth temple of



Vardhamān-Barākar of the eighth century, which is made of stone. The sanctuary, on the lower plinth, is relatively high, and above it is a short rekha or pinnacled roof. Originally the pinnacle rose in a slightly curved line, and on top of it was a broad stone myrobalan, the acute lines of which were regulated in firm simplicity.

Subsequent stages in the development of the rekha temple produced three small nivedana temples. Two of these are of stone (one discovered at Dinājpur and the other at Nimadīghi in Rājśāhī) and the third is of bronze (found at Jheoarī in Caṭṭagram district). The sanctuary, decorated with linear patterns, is part of the ground plan; on the four sides of the sanctuary are the three-levelled portals or recesses; on the roof is the gradually curved pinnacle, at the peak of which is a myrobalan on a narrow neck. At this stage of development too, the lines of the stone myrobalan are sharp and straight, but ornamentations in the body of the pinnacle created the illusion of the bay

windows of a place of worship.

There are about four or five ruined or partly ruined examples of the third stage of development. From the ground plan, sanctuary, pinnacle and embellishment of these temples it is clear that there are no particular basic differences from the pinnacled nivedana temples mentioned earlier, although these temples are grander in size and embellishment and are more complex in shape and design. The main difference is in the polished fineness of the somewhat rounded lines of the myrobalan; hence, the shape of the entire pinnacle was adorned with small decorative pinnacles, and a balcony was attached to the entrance portal.

The rekha or sikhara temples of ancient Bengal clearly reveal a resemblance to such temples of Bhuvaneśvara as the Satrugheśvara, the Parasurāma and the Muktesvara Temples, and it may fairly be held that they were all of the same period and that they obviously preceded



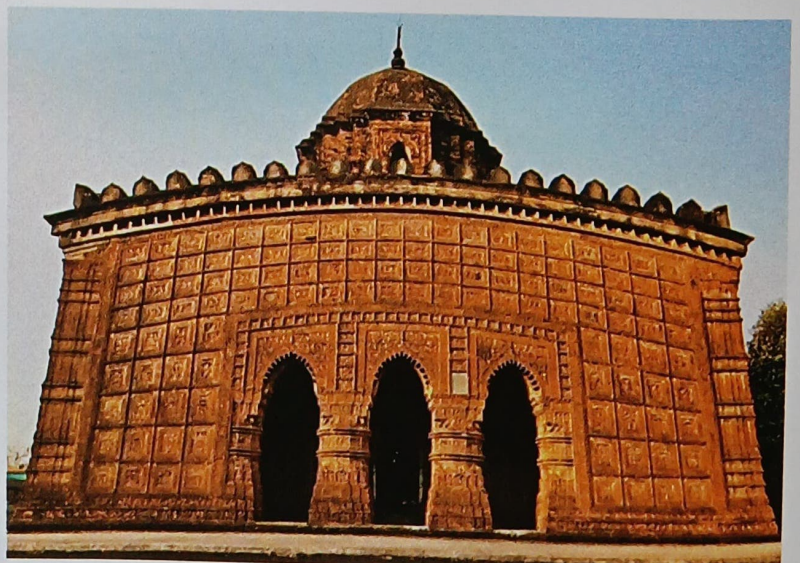
the Liṅgarāja Temple. Here another characteristic of the Bengali temples can be discerned: these temples had no offertory pavilion as do the temples of Orissa, the body of the temple consisting only of the sanctuary with its pinnacle and myrobalan, although there were some cases where a niche in the front wall took the place of an offertory pavilion. In the ground plan and the adornment of Orissa's Liṅgarāja and later temples there is a variety and a complexity not to be found in the temples of Bengal, but although the Bengali temples were small, they expressed a harmony with a very polished and well-disciplined taste.

There were not many examples of stūpaśīrṣa bhadra or pīra temples in ancient Bengal. However, in a manuscript painting in the Cambridge University library there is a depiction of a Lokanātha temple said to be at a place called Nālendra. Above the rectangular sanctuary is a sloping, tapering roof, and on the four sides of several of its levels there is a small decorative stūpa. There is little room for doubt that this type of temple inspired the form and style of the eleventh century Abhayadana and Patothamya temples of Pagan in Burma.

There is no actual example of śikharaśīrṣa pīra or bhadra temple either, but from a depiction of a Buddha temple in Puṇḍravardhana in a manuscript painting and the engravings of several temples of this type on a number of



stone panels, it can be assumed that the śikharaśīrṣa pīra or bhadra temple was quite common and well known throughout Bengal. This type of temple had a layered series of diminishing roofs above the rectangular sanctuary, and above the topmost roof was a curved pinnacle above which was a myrobalan; if it were a Buddhist temple there would



be a small symbol of a stūpa on top of the myrobalan stone. In the Burmese city of Pagan this kind of Bengali temple inspired such temples as the Khatbinchu, the Tih-lo-minh-lo, the Soyegu-jyi and others.

In the excavation of the vast ruins of Pāhārpur the remains of a large temple have been discovered. This temple was one of the great wonders of ancient Bengal.

In the Indian treatises on building there is some information concerning a type of temple called sarvatobhadra. It was rectangular and of four chambers; that is, there were four sanctuaries on its four sides, with portals giving access to each of the sanctuaries. According to the treatises this type of temple was of five storeys, each having sixteen corners. Around each storey was a wall and a circumambulatory balcony, and the entire temple was embellished with numerous small pinnacles and crests. The great temple of Pāhārpur is a splendid example of sarvatobhadra temple, though no remains of this type have been found to date anywhere else in India. May be this style was not common in the rest of India, although there is much evidence of its appreciation outside of India, especially in Java and Burma. In the ancient city of Pagan, the four-chambered Khatbinchu or Sarvajña, the Soyegu-jyi, the Tih-lo-minh-lo and other temples and in the town of Prambanama in Java the ancient Loro-jongrang Temple and the Śiva Temple were all conceived and built on the same inspiration. Chronologically, the eighth century Pāhārpur Temple preceded them all.

Kashinath Diksīt (Diksīt 1938) and

Sarasikumar Sarasvati (Sarasvati 1978) discussed the overall form, nature and structure of Pāhārpur. The ground plan of the temple was rectangular (3561/1feet by 3141/4feet); each side was extended to create a number of angles. Over the entire area of the rectangular base a large, hollow, four-sided column rose up, and its top described the peak of the temple, although it is not possible to determine whether the peak was in the form of a pinnacle or a stūpa. This huge hollow column had very thick walls and was the centre of the whole complex; each diminishing level and its balcony and wall, the four chambers, the pavilions and so on were all conceived and arranged within its ambit. Although the temple was four-faced, it had only one entry portal, which was on the northern side. There was a very wide portico on the plinth, with a staircase leading up to it from the courtyard; beyond the portico at the southern end, going through the portal in the surrounding wall, was the entry to the balcony of the plinth. The circumambulatory balcony went around the four sides of the temple and was contained by an enclosing parapet. From one side a staircase ascended to the diminished first level, on which there was also a similar balcony, enclosing parapet and, above, a pavilion at each of the four sides. It is clear that a stairway led from the first to the second storey, this storey being the pre-eminent one and the finest of all, and on this level were four sanctuaries to the sides of the central hollow pillar, with a pavilion in front of each of them. Undoubtedly, these sanctuaries were the main chambers of worship.

The Pāhārpur Temple was constructed

from terracotta and mud bricks. There is some embellishment on the external walls, but apart from the numerous terracotta plaques there is no other attempt to propagate that splendour. On the face of the plinth there is no dearth of stone plaques. Obviously, this huge temple took time to build, yet there is such an integrity in its overall structure and conception that it would appear that it was from start to finish the creation of a single design and was constructed in virtually one endeavour. It is very likely that its patron was the emperor, Dharmapāla, and that it was during his reign that the temple and monastery were built.

It is undeniable that there was a close relation between the ancient Bengali temple types and techniques and those of many temples outside of India, especially in Burma and Java. If a comparison be made with all these temples, we may get a clear idea of the design and appearance of the temples of ancient Bengal. The temples of the bhadra or pīra type with their sloping, receding roofs, and at one time this style was very widespread in Burma; also, throughout the middle-ages, this kind of palace temple, built mostly in timber but also in brick, was constructed in some profusion. There are still several stone temples of this kind in the courtyard of Caṇḍī-Panataram in Java, and the style is still followed in Bali and Burma. As well as the bhadra or pīra class of temples it would seem that the stūpa or śikharaśīrṣa bhadra or pīra type of temple on a rectangular sanctuary also captivated the Burmese imagination from about the sixth or seventh century. Needless to say, the source of inspiration of this extra-Indian enterprise was also ancient Bengal.

Handicrafts

A society without beauty is soulless. Living in a beautified environment with a certain amount of individuality adds immeasurably to our life. Crafts and craft skills are important contributors to this ideal. Bengal is known for its expertise in art and craft skills. From time immemorial they have been ceaselessly adding colours to their lives through their endeavour to beautify their habitat. From pottery to textiles, from mat making to leather crafts, from kāthā stitching to muslin weaving everywhere they have left their indelible marks. Before concluding this chapter, it won't be out of place to throw some light on the multifarious aspects of Bengal's handicrafts. Bengal's handicrafts have found expressions in a number of handcrafted arts like pottery (including clay dolls), brass and bell metal crafts, Ḍokrā art, textiles including stitching (kāthā embroidery) and weaving (tāt, muslin, etc), mat making, jute craft, cane and bamboo craft, wooden masks craft, solapith and the like. Following is a short exposition of the Bengal's legacy of handicrafts.

Ḍokrā Metal Casting

Ḍokrā art of Bengal, an age-old craft, uses lost-wax casting technique to create artefacts from non-ferrous metals like bronze and copper-based alloys with the application of traditional folk motifs and techniques. The ancient Mohenjo-Daro figurine of the Dancing Girl from the days of the Indus Valley Civilization is one of the glowing testimonials to this form of art which dates back to over 2500 BC. The Ḍokrā Kāmār tribes are the traditional

metalsmiths of West Bengal. They follow a technique of metal casting known as *Ḍokrā*, named after the tribe. The object is cast in metal, using what is known as the lost-wax technique. Evidence of this kind of casting of copper-based alloys has been found in China, Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, and some areas of Central America too. The artefacts are ritual objects and their themes are mostly animals, jewellery, and icons of gods and goddesses. Amongst the trinkets made by these artisans, *pāyeri* (anklets), *hāsuli* (necklace), earrings and bangles are most abundant. Besides these, some of the knickknacks made by these artisans are the *Buli* (piggybank) and a ceremonial finial pot *kalās*, which is mounted on a wooden pole for festivals. The West Bengal metal workers, known as the *Ḍokrās* and the *Ḍheppons* inhabit



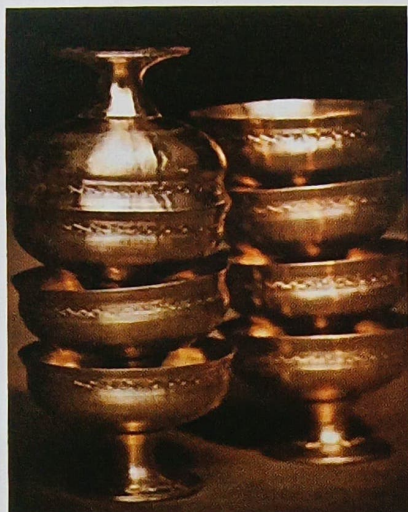
the districts of Bankura, Midnapore, Purulia, Birbhum and Burdwan. Burdwan's *Dariyāpur* near Guskara is one such village where everyone is a *Ḍokrā* artist. The village has around 133 families and their finesse and precision with the designs of an art so steeped in antiquity

has earned them the prestigious AIACA Craftmark. The *Ḍokrā* metal casting is perhaps the only living tradition of metal image making in the eastern India. The technique has managed to survive many centuries and change of dynasties owing to its modesty of application in everyday lives of ordinary people.

Brass and bell metal craft

Brass and bell metal craft has been an old handicraft product of the State. Handed down to generations of metalworkers, their product has varied from cooking utensils to vessels for special occasions. Artisans of Bankura, Bishnupur, Ghatal and Chandanpur in Midnapore, are engaged in engraved brass and bell metal work. *Khāgrā*, a neighbourhood of Baharampur in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, is renowned for its manufacture of bell-metal and brass utensils by the *Kaṁsa Baṇik* community. The beautiful products have a rich sheen and a fine finish. In Bankura, *Ghāṭāl* and Purulia, artisans are noted for moulding bigger items in an exquisite fashion. The poor artisans of Chandrapur also display an admirable skill of engraving the heads of goddesses and gods, whose idols are made with bell metal. Locally known as *kāsā*, bell-metal utensils like bowls, tumblers, serving dishes and *thālis* are still used in many middleclass Bengali households. Besides *Khagra*, bell-metal utensils are also a source of livelihood for craftspeople in Baharampur, *Kāndi*, Baranagar and Jangipur in and around the Nadia district of West Bengal. Locks and betel-nut cutters of a superior quality are made at *Dhuliyān* and iron chests at Jangipur. The methods or techniques that

are generally used in bell-metal craft are chasing, delicate engraving, repousse and embossing, etching, incising, inlaying, pierced work, and filigree. Bell-metal is



a hard alloy that was originally used to make prayer bells and related musical instruments such as cymbals. It is a form of bronze with a higher tin content that increases the rigidity of the metal and also its resonance. Several colonial records reflect that in Bengal images of gods and goddesses, along with prayer lamps, were principally made in Nabadwīp, Krishnanagar and Kolkata. These images were mainly used for worship in Hindu homes. Although they are now mostly made of brass, earlier they were made of *aṣṭa-dhātu*, an alloy of eight metals. This genre represents the more classic metal works in Bengal.

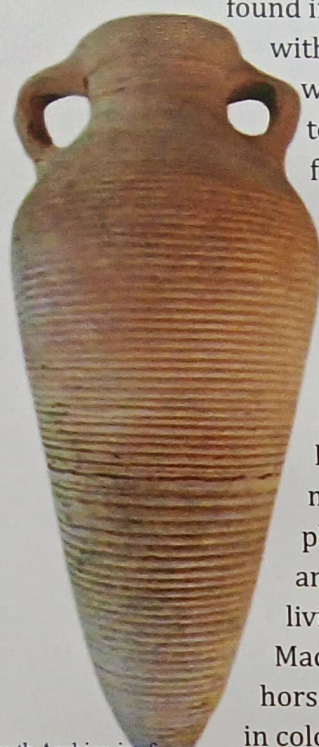
Pottery

Terracotta craft in Bengal has played an integral part in the life of the village folk. The brick and terracotta temples of Bishnupur and those scattered in Birbhum were built during the 17th and 18th centuries and several of their plaques and medallions depict animals,

birds and humans, along with floral and geometric patterns as part of the temple façade scattered with narratives from our epics like the *Purāṇas* and tales about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's celestial love, as well as everyday scenes that reflect the expertise of the artists and the refined taste of the patrons. Pottery is one of the oldest human inventions, originating before the Neolithic period. The potter's wheel was invented in Mesopotamia sometime between 6,000 and 4,000 BC and revolutionised pottery production. The Indus Valley civilization also had an ancient tradition of pottery making though the origin of pottery in India can be traced back to the much earlier Mesolithic Age, with coarse handmade



pottery like bowls, jars and vessels in various colours such as red, orange, brown, black and cream. Terracotta or clay craft has been the symbol of man's first attempt at craftsmanship, just as the potter's wheel was the first machine invented to use the power of motion for a productive purpose. For many years, civilizations have been dated and assessed by the degree of skill and beauty displayed by the earthenware



South Arabian jar from Karanji, East Medinipur (courtesy of Rajanikanta Sangrahashala, Dharas, Medinipur)

found in excavations. Its association with religious rituals has infused it with deeper significance. In India, terracotta traditions are found from the earliest times. However, the terracotta Bankura horse has become an iconic symbol of Bengal art together with the terracotta shrines. The Government of India uses the Bankura horse in its logo for All-India Handicrafts and such is its magic that it has found a pride of place at many homes across India and abroad, adorning fashionable living rooms and verdant gardens.

Made of terracotta or burnt clay, the horse is either mud-brown or black in colour and has been praised for 'its elegant stance and unique abstraction of basic values.' In Bankura district of West Bengal the horse is depicted as an art object with some ornamentation.

Its history is interesting chequered but it has withstood the vagaries of time and tide. Initially used in

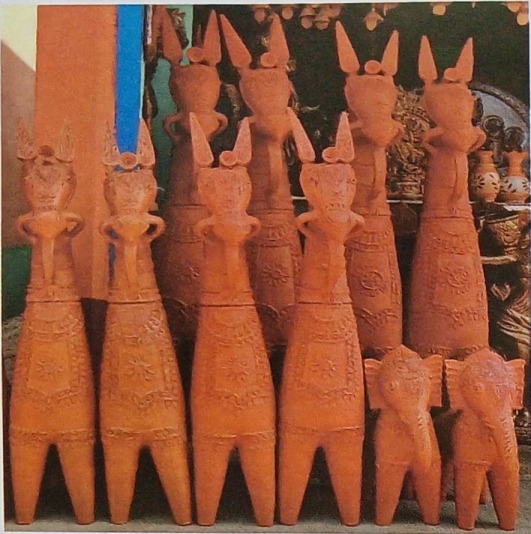
village rituals as a tool for symbolic sacrifice, done to appease local



and

gods and goddesses for fulfilment of wishes, these horses made for worship are usually solid in built and taller than the usual steeds that are sold in markets and village fairs. Today the ever-popular terracotta steeds stand erect and perky, with lively long ears and a slender neck. They wear the cādmālā on the forehead and Dharma Ṭhākur, who is also believed to be a form of Lord Sūrya, rides a seven-horse chariot. The village of Pācmurā in Bankura district is famous for its traditional terracotta craft. Around five hundred crafts persons in the villages of Pācmurā, Bibardha and Sendra carry forward their trade in a family-based tradition. Belonging to the Kumbhakār caste, making terracotta items is the primary source of their livelihood. Other centres where terracotta horses and elephants are produced are Rajagrām, Sonāmukhī and Hāmīrpur, Kamaridha, Bishnupur, Jaikrishnapur, Nakaijuri and Keyaboti. Each place has its particular local style. However, the Pācmurā-style of pottery is considered the best and the finest. At Kumārṭuli in Kolkata, some of Bengal's most innovative clay-potters fashion the images of popular gods and goddesses worshipped in the state. The high point comes when in autumn every year, idols of goddess Durgā are made.

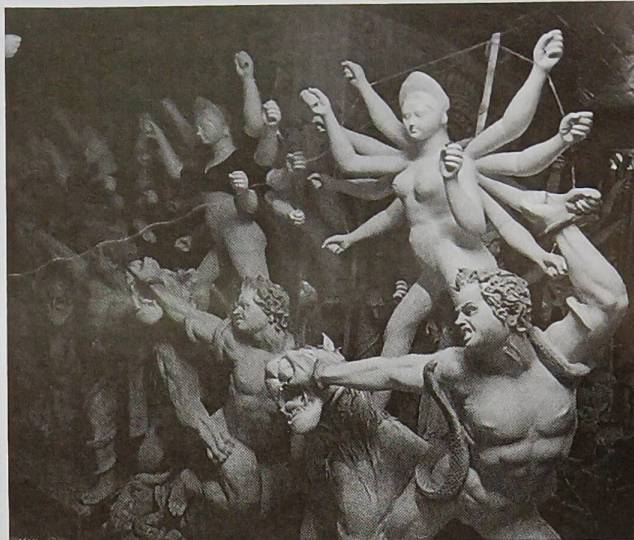
Some of them are indeed exquisite works of art. Today, some renowned sculptors are also commissioned by Bengali non-resident Indians (NRIs) to produce replicas of Goddess Durgā. The patronage for Clay Dolls by Maharaja Krishnachandra of Krishnanagar in the late 18th century has been a major factor for real-life stylized, clay Dolls originating from the State.



Mat making:

Mat-weaving in India dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization and is also reflected in Indian folklore, in which the saints were offered grass mats to sit upon. Its socio-cultural relevance is evidenced by references in ancient literature, including the Atharva Veda, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and the Mahābhārata. Records from the Medieval Period provide the first information about mat-weaving in the region of Bengal, with both ordinary and fine quality mats produced in the district of Midnapore. The premium mat, the masland, derives its name from the Persian word 'masnad,' which means 'throne.' These mats originated in the Muslim period of Indian history as the best floor-coverings, produced in Midnapore with a silk weft under the patronage of the royal community of that time. The Midnapore district village of

Maslandpur, located close to Tamluk subdivision, probably takes its name from the masland mat. Mats were collected as revenue under the Jagirdari system. In 1744, Nawab Alibardi Khan issued a charter to the jagirdars in this regard. As a result, it was obligatory to supply

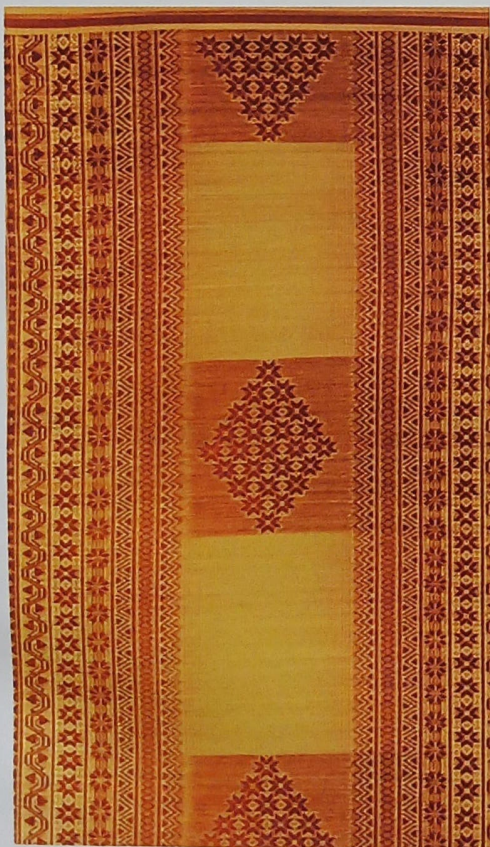


masland mats for use to the collectorate. Soon, permanent markets for mats were established and Kaśījorā, Raghunāthbāri and Nārājol became the most important centres of fine masland mat-weaving. Government officials in the British period observed that a large number of masland mats, manufactured in Midnapore, became popular all over Bengal. According to a census report of 1872, there were 618 skilled workers engaged in matmaking. Records of the British Raj show that at the beginning of the 20th century the price of masland mats were a phenomenal Rs 100/- or more, the finest quality mādurs being even dearer. Today, mat-weaving is the primary source of income for 77% craft-persons who either make hand-woven mats or develop loom-based products in and around Midnapore. Few traditional mat-making families still retain the knowledge of weaving the fine masland or matarañci. Besides making folding mats, the loom-based units have diversified into making various utility items and accessories such as bags, folders, table mats, runners, coasters and boxes to suit contemporary lifestyles. Māhiṣyas, the weavers of Midnapore, are skilled at creating the most popular mats



known as mādur. They weave these on uncomplicated looms made of bamboo. The warp uses cotton thread while the weft is a thin soft reed known as mādur-kāṭhi. Midnapore craftsmen design these ek-rokhā and do-rokhā mats with great skill and dexterity. The word 'mādur' is a generic term for floor mats in Bengal. The do-rokhā is thicker than the ek-rokhā mats, more suitable for use as impromptu carpets. Masland, on the other hand, is a textured mat on which the craftspeople

designs geometrical shapes on both the borders. These designs are self-coloured but sometimes get painted in shades of magenta. Masland mats are used to honour important guests and relatives, spread with pride for them to sit on and perhaps partake of a meal. Mādurs are sold in the local markets for day-to-day use and also transported to adjoining states to be expended for ritualistic purposes. With the shift in market needs, the weaves are now also used for making decorative and utilitarian items. Today, Bhagabānpur is the hub of mādur-kāṭhi weaving in East Midnapore. Barbāsudevpur, which is the main centre, is located between Mecheda and Dīghā. The place is well connected with Kolkata. Sabang is the largest concentration of mādur weavers in West Midnapore. Other areas that ply this craft are Pinglā and Narayaṅgarh. Mādur artists of the district regularly visit craft fairs and art events.



Mādur-kāṭhi, the backbone of the mats, is a rhizome-based plant found abundantly in the alluvial tracts of Midnapore. The land and climate are very conducive for cultivating these reeds. The sticks can be reaped within a period of a year or two once the rhizomes are sown. The main seasons for cutting the sticks are April-July and September-November. Once the soft inner tissue is discarded, the stalks are ready for dyeing and weaving after they have been soaked in water to make them pliable and soft. Mādur sticks were initially dyed with vegetable colours. However, nowadays chemical-free dyes are used to get more variety. The loom is usually operated by a single person. A length of a mat is produced which is then tailored according to the size of the product. The setting process is tedious and complicated but the end result is always artistically satisfying. Weaving masland mats is, however, more complicated and at least two persons are required to complete the process. The popular design on masland mats are flowers, honeycombs and various geometrical patterns, and the process of weaving is very much like the weaving of cotton saris. Palmyra leaves, shaped like fans, are also made into mats locally called cāṭāis. Palm leaf mats are very beautifully designed at Ilambāzār in Birbhūm district by women belonging to the Muslim community. These mats are colourful and sport geometrical designs in shades of green, blue and magenta. The traditional mādur mat, nevertheless, continues to remain a permanent fixture in several Bengali households. They linger on to adorn numerous homes with an ethnic décor instead of woollen carpets. And in the rural outposts, these mats can be easily spread out almost anywhere dry



to sleep upon and, perchance, to dream.

Cane and bamboo craft

The origins of this handicraft can be traced back to the 2nd century AD, as mentioned in classical literature that describes the vast bamboo and cane forests. Countless skilled artisans in West Bengal dedicate themselves to crafting bamboo and cane mats of exceptional quality, as well as captivating and elegant screens and panels. Popular bamboo

Fragment of a plaque
from Chandraketugarh
showing two artisans
making cane stools.
Image source: Haque,
2001.

and cane items from the region include panels, screens, and mats, showcasing the artistry of West Bengal. Different methods of production are confined to the following types, e.g.

(1) Plaited baskets: Plaited basketry primarily involves two sets of elements—warp and weft—interwoven with one another. These baskets are crafted in various patterns such as checkered, twilled, twined, wrapped, and hexagonal designs. They are commonly used for storing clothes, ornaments, and items like cane suitcases, which are typically made using this technique.

(2) Wickerwork: In wickerwork, the warp is less flexible, while the weft is pliable and woven alternately over and under the warp. This method maintains the warp with less rigidity. Plucking baskets are typically made using this technique.

(3) Coiled basketry: In Coiled basketry the warp is arranged by cane of comfortable length. Before arrangement, such cane is soaked in water for few minutes to give it a flexible character. Simply binding coiled cane while the process of weaving is in operation preserves the shape of the basket. Finally, the edge of the basket is stitched with a thin and flexible cane slip. Plucking baskets, ration baskets, baskets used for carrying earth, stone-chips, coal etc. are all manufactured in this method. Weaving, twining and coiling techniques are used for making cane baskets and mats. The production of reed and bamboo involves the cutting of whole stems with a hacksaw. It is then sliced longitudinally along the length of the densely packed fibres into splits of various sizes using

a bill-hook or *dāo*. A fairly smooth operation is done to retain moisture in the culm. Kerosene lamp is used to heat the cane



before it can be bent into purely by hand. Occasionally the artisans use water to soften the splits.

Artefacts: Moshtha (multi-purpose floor covering), containers of various shapes and sizes tray. Floor covering mats, door mats, boxes, baskets, vases, bags, baskets, handbags, lampshades, furniture, container for drinking water, container for storing grain, lamps, lanterns, travel kit, sarki, chiks, curtains, dali, basket, pahi, tahuki, tapi, ganja, fish catching design, dhaki, big-size basket, pathia, small sizebasket, medhadambara, umbrella made of bamboo sticks.

Lakshmi Casket: It is one of the oldest crafts of Bengal and Orissa. The famous Lakshmi casket is double walled, cane inside, and bamboo twill work outside. This is generally covered with a red cloth on which seven decorations like floral designs are worked out of small shells. There are oval boxes, oblong jhimpis and flower baskets called phulsajis. These are beautifully decorated with floral, figured and geometrical patterns using coloured strands as also accessories such as shells, beads etc.

The coil is fixed to another by sewing strips with two main varieties; the simple over coil where each stitch passes over the new portion of the foundation coil below, the other is where the figure of eight is worked. Here the stitch passes behind up, over and down under the preceding coil and right over the new coil. The fixing of the coil is done with bamboo splints. There is quite a wide variety in the coiled articles, ranging from rough storage jars to very elegant jewellery boxes.



Moorahs: Chairs (Stools) called moorahs, a major export item, are made of bamboo and cane are manufactured in many parts of Haryana. With time and research, the traditional moorah has undergone sea of changes in design and style. The seat is often artistically woven out of jute strings to make it more durable. A very large variety of items are made from raffia like baskets, trays, wall-decorations, children furniture being most attractive. Cane or rattan is a kind of a climbing palm with long thin, solid and many joined stems. The stems are dried after removing the green sheath. It is extra ordinarily strong. After drying, the cane rods are cleaned and heated over a fire to make them pliable. Cane rods are used to make legs and supports and for actual interlacing cane splints are used. Low seats called mooras are made of bamboo and cane, the top being woven in artistic designs.

Rush Mats: Karai is a special kind grass growing wildy along the river banks. A

peculiarity about this grass is that it can be used for the very fine varieties only when it grows wild. Every attempt to cultivate it has been frustrated because of the coarseness it develops when one tries to cultivate it.

Shell and conch shell craft

Conch-shell craft involves the intricate art of engraving detailed images onto natural shells sourced from the sea. The shells used are primarily from a large predatory sea snail, *Turbinella Pyrum*, which is found in the Indian Ocean. The shell's main body is either oblong or conical in shape. In the oblong variety, it has a bulge in the center, tapering off at both ends. The upper section, known as the siphonal canal, is spiral-shaped, while the lower end, or spire, is twisted and tapers sharply. The shell's color is dull, and its surface is hard, brittle, and translucent. Like all sea shells, the interior is hollow. The inner surfaces are very shiny, but the outer surface exhibits high tuberculation. In Hinduism, the shiny



white,
soft shankh

with pointed ends is the most sought after for religious purposes. Conch shell craft is, indeed, one of the oldest folk crafts of West Bengal. The craftsmen, known as Śākhāri or Śamkhakār, belong to the ancient Nabaśākhā, which is one of the so-called nine important communities of craftspeople blessed by the Divine. The carvings on the conch shell reflect their social, mythological and historical expressions, rendered with the help of traditional folklore and technology. The beauty and uniqueness of this craft is difficult to describe. As one of the most exclusive and beautiful forms of art practised in West Bengal, conch shell craft is an extremely sophisticated and delicate skill considered to be exceptionally auspicious. This craft form is also very expensive and cannot be afforded by everybody. Each conch shell artisan has his own unique pattern of carving and while some draw the image of Lord Shiva over the shell, others create entire episodes from the Mahābhārata on its surface. Then, the stories of Lord Krishna also serve as popular themes for

engraving the smaller shells to give them a unique individuality. It is very difficult to carve a conch shell, taking a minimum of two to three months to design a single shell item. The conch shell craft is not a new art in Bengal. Due to the state's proximity to the sea, this skill has been practised here for ages. The newly wed bride in Bengal wears bangles crafted from conch shells intermingled with those

Right: Terracotta plaque showing Conch-shell blowing lady at Uma-Shiva marriage on Vishnu temple, Ramchandrapur, Medinipur. Image source: Haque, Zulekha, 2014.



fashioned in lac for the first time on her wedding day. The crafts-persons design many different patterns and shapes on these bangles. Similar to the chooda of Punjab, these wristlets reflect a woman's marital status. Traditional images of Goddess Durga are adorned with pretty conch shell bangles to indicate that she is the consort of Lord Shiva. The crafts-persons also design brooches, pendants, finger rings and earrings for other gods and goddesses and also for

mere mortals! Conch shells are blown in numerous homes and temples, especially at dawn and at dusk, to protect people from evil spirits. The blowing of the conch or śākh needs tremendous power and respiratory capacity. Hence, propelling it daily helps keep the lungs healthy. Used as an important ritual object for sacred ceremonies, it was also operated as a ceremonial trumpet, announcing important messages in war fields. Some of us may know about the fabled Panchjanya, the conch shell blown by Lord Krishna to begin the Battle of Kurukshetra. But interestingly, each Pāṇḍava brother also used his own conch shell in that combat that had fascinating names. Arjuna used the Debadutta, Bhim relied on the Pauṇḍra, Yudhishtir blew the Anant Vijay, Nakul employed the Sughosh and Sahadev manipulated the Maṇipuṣpak. In Hindu mythology, the śākh is a sacred emblem of the Supreme Preserver, Lord Vishnu. The reverberation of the śākh symbolises the sacred Om sound and is praised in our scriptures as a giver of fame, longevity and prosperity, the cleanser of sin and the abode of goddess Lakshmi, who is the deity of wealth and consort of Vishnu. The śākh is also one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism—the Aṣṭamaṅgalā—and represents the all-pervasive vibration of Buddhist prayers. Conch shell craft, a family profession, has everyone in the household taking an active interest. The traditions, skills and techniques needed are confined to family members only and are transferred within the clan through practical demonstration. Because the conch shell surface is very hard, it is difficult to work on it or cut it. Today the slicing is done



largely by electric disc saws that are fitted with diamond teeth. The traditional method of cutting is very laborious. It is done with a special type of semicircular saw with a sharp edge called Sākher Karāt. The process involves collecting the raw material, handling the shells, shaping them with the help of tools, engraving or embossing various designs and then polishing and completing the product for sale. Today, conch shells are used in a variety of ways – from spiritual ceremonies to creating items of home décor. With beautiful engravings etched on its crust, these seashells are renowned not only in Bengal but all over the world. Apart from engraved shells, other conch

shell crafts
include
making



items like table lamps, incense holders, ashtrays, vermilion containers, spoons and forks from the crusts. In West Bengal, conch shells are also used for crafting jewellery items like fashionable armlets, designer lockets, and delicate buttons, hairpins and clips. Some of the popular spots to buy conch shell articles are Bishnupur, Murshidabad, Malda and Nadia. Though the craft is getting rarer, the shell industry still plays an important role in generating livelihood for several families, blessed by the gods.

Embroidery

Embroidery from West Bengal is internationally renowned for its simplicity, particularly the works originating from the rural areas of the state. One of the most famous forms of embroidery in West Bengal is Kāthā stitch work. This traditional embroidery features folk motifs that vividly reflect the rural landscape and culture of the region. The local women are engaged in this type of embroidery work with the simple running stitches. The traditional form of Kāthā embroidery was done in the soft dhotis and sarees. Sometimes this particular embroidery is applied to make quilts. In this form of embroidery, to make the embroidery perceptible, the outer layers of the cloth are made up with white or light-coloured clothes. The women create Lepkāthā, Sujni Kāthā etc. with Kāthā embroidery. This embroidery work is also used to create stoles and shawls which are intricately embroidered featuring various geometrical and traditional patterns. In addition to these, the artisans create an illusion by applying Kāthā embroidery on woollen, cotton and silk shawls and give them a different

look. Kāthā embroidery is also done on covers for mirrors, boxes, pillows etc. The basic patterns of this type of embroidery are basically derived from the mundane world of the inhabitants of the village. Such stitches on the cloth give it a slight wrinkled wavy effect on the created items. Generally, Kāthā embroidery is done on sarees, dupatta, shirts for men and women, bedding and other furnishing fabrics using cotton and pure silk as raw materials. Nakśi kāthā is a prominent work of art that has secured a distinct position in the history of embroidery of West Bengal for its legendary tales. The 'nakśi kāthā' shawls stand exemplary for the expression of culture and tradition of West Bengal depicted in the creations. The designs of geometric, symmetrical Kantha are derived from the traditional art of ālpanās (ritualistic drawings made on the floors to signify worship or celebration). The shawls of Kāthā embroidery are identified for their unique use of colours and patterns.

Apart from Kāthā embroidery, the artisans of West Bengal are adept in chikan work, the zari work and Kaśidā embroidery. White cotton thread on fine white muslin fabric is used in this type of elegant embroidery work. With the intelligent perception and creative ability, the artisans create exclusive shaded designs by varying the textures appropriately. Mainly done on muslin and cotton fabric, the chikan embroidery of West Bengal involves the usage of mogā silk for outlining the embroidered portions of the created items and to give the items an added glitz. Though white on white is a popular combination other coloured threads are also used in white cloth. The Kaśidā embroidery is done with silk yarns on cotton clothes and

the created items of this embroidery work have a great demand in the local market. This type of embroidery is used on caps and scarves used by the Muslims for prayers. Including these, Kashmiri stitches, Cross stitches, Convent stitches, Cut work are added in the list of embroidery of West Bengal. The artisans of West Bengal create exclusive items executing Kāthiāwāri mirror work that are hugely practiced in different regions of this state. Embroidery of West Bengal is distinct in their style and presentation. The created items are exclusive and the manifestation of the tradition the state carries. The embroidered articles are highly sought after in the local and the Indian market as well. The art of the kāthā stitch has been passed down from mothers to daughters in Bengali households for centuries. In recent times, the realisation of this cultural heritage intertwined with entrepreneurship skills has brought a new dawn to the village of Nānur in West Bengal's Birbhum district. Even though Bolpur, Ilambazar, Lābhpur and Mangalkot nearby are also renowned for their traditional kantha, it is Nanur that is leading the way. Nanur, located between two rivers, Ajay and Mayurakshi, is known for the old terracotta temples of Pala and Sena Dynasty. The nearest railway station is Bolpur from where Nanur is 18 kms away. Here, around 2,000 women are engaged in kantha embroidery which has provided them an important income option. A number of women acknowledge that they have been able to overcome poverty and young girls can now pursue their education. Stories and myth behind the origin of kāthā trace their history to a period no less than a thousand years. Its images reach back to even earlier sources of



pre- and post-Vedic period. Originating as an art form where stories or katha in all their bucolic splendour were woven onto cloth, it is believed to have also had religious importance. This unique art has been passed down through generations, involving an utmost labour-intensive process as each individual needs to use his or her bare hands to weave the intricate stitches. Etymologically, the word 'kāthā' originally suggests a light quilt used during mild winters and cool monsoon nights. Though the concept exists in almost all parts of the world, this particular form of quilting is peculiar to Bengal, unique in its power of imagination and functional in its use, representing the cultural identity and folk

art of this land. It is essentially a women's art since the development of kâthā emerged out of the creative expressions of rural women as gifts for babies or their loved ones. Several layers of used or worn-out material such as sarees, lungis and dhotis are stitched together to make a single kâthā. The colourful patterns and designs that are embroidered on these articles resulted in the name 'Nakṣi-Kâthā,' derived from the word 'nakṣā' which refers to inventive patterns. Each of these kanthas represents the contents of a woman's mind and is filled with romance, sentiment and philosophy. Five hundred years ago, the earliest reference of kâthā in Bengal was found in Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta by Krishandas Kabiraj. Some symbols such as the Tree of Life, the swirling cosmos and the sun are taken from primitive art. It was the Bengali housewife who helped the virtuosity of embroidery to evolve. From embellishing her husband's initials on his handkerchief to sewing pieces of

herself with needle and yarn as soon as her domestic chores were over and she could work at leisure. It became a symbolic enactment of the cycle of life and its affirmation of rebirth and revival. Something as simple and basic as a running stitch at the hand of skilled artists create a magical artwork and a wonderful means of self-expression by our rural women. And their artistic brilliance keeps finding new expression in a range of lifestyle products. However, it is important to note that kâthā embroidery is not the primary source of revenue for these women. Like most places in rural Bengal, their basic income comes from agriculture. But they devote a significant amount of their spare time daily to kantha embroidery to augment their earnings. Like any other folk art, kâthā-making is influenced by several factors that include availability of materials, daily needs, climate, geography and economic requirements. From the earliest forms of this stitch art that relied on



discarded cloth with colourful thread to make kâthā duvets, the lady of the house busied

patchwork kâthā and decorative appliqué sewn

with great skill, today it commands huge respect in the international couture market. When the Portuguese arrived on the eastern coast of India all those years ago, they were astonished by the simple elegance of *kāthā* quilts, which reminded them of their needle-craft back home in the 17th century when their ship, the *Frol-de-la-Mar* carried Bengal *kāthā* all the way to the ports of Lisbon. *Kāthā* stitched shawls exported from Bengal in early 17th century were worn by the queens of Portugal. The traditional designs had a central motif, such as *Śatadal Padma*, the hundred-petaled lotus, or a large spiral of the energetic sun. The Tree of Life would be placed in four corners with free flowing *jāls*. The indigenous art form of *kāthā* would have died had it not for the efforts of a few individuals who were keen to revive and sustain it. In early 1940s, a resuscitation of *kāthā* was spearheaded by Pratima Devi, daughter-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore, as a part of a comprehensive rural reconstruction programme among the local Santhal women who were trained to produce fresh motifs under the tutelage of artists from Kala Bhavana. Her prime focus was to give *kāthā* a new look and a new identity, popularising it nationally and internationally. *Kāthā* comprises the simplest running stitch in the language of embroidery. Yet it is making a mark in the international market. Anyone who works on a quilt, who devotes her time, energy, creativity, and passion to that art, learns to value the work of her hands. And as any quilter will tell you, a quilter's quilting friends are some of the dearest, most generous, and most supportive people she knows. Today, *Nakśi-Kāthā* can be viewed in its new avatar with its roots in the traditional form of folk art but

catering to top designers for their urban haute-couture creations. *Nakśi-Kāthā* has become a steady, thriving business and its revival is based on the art and craft trends, with high international demand for genuine hand fashioned work. The effect is certainly very pleasing to the discerning eyes that appreciates an easy elegance, a sense of grace and a taste for finesse in life amid the chaos of bling and braggadocio.

Weaving

Bengal cotton handlooms or *tāts* are known for their light, airy texture ideally suited for the warm and humid summers of this region. *Tāt* sarees are characterized by a thick border, a decorative *Pallav* and are woven with a variety of floral, paisley and other artistic motifs. The main weaving centres are concentrated around Shantipur and Fulia. Under royal patronage in the Mughal era, once the *tāt jāmdāni* and muslin sarees became famous, the British government tried to destroy this art to protect the textile industry of Manchester. The weavers of Shantipur had a strong sense of identity and solidarity. They came together to protest against the oppressive *Dādni* system imposed by the British East India Company, even taking their complaints to colonial courts in the 19th century. Despite significant demographic changes in the Shantipur region following the Partition of 1947, the *tāt* weaving tradition managed to endure. Many Hindu weavers, fleeing the violence in what became East Pakistan, settled in large numbers along both sides of the Ganga in Nadia and Burdwan districts. A considerable number among them also put down their roots in Fulia and the



neighbouring village of Shantipur. Fulia is now uttered in the same breath as Shantipur. Weavers here trace their lineage to the great Bengal handloom saree-weaving centre of Tangail near Dhaka in Bangladesh but, reconciling to their new circumstances, they have now evolved their own weaving style called 'Fulia Tangail.' Records show that handloom saree weaving in Shantipur, a hub of Vaishnavite culture and the Bhakti Movement, dates back to the 15th century. Weaving thrived throughout the medieval and Mughal periods, with the renowned indigo-dyed Neelaambari saree making Shantipur famous. This distinct midnight blue cotton saree, dyed with indigo, was so captivating that it was referred to as

'an enemy of modesty' by the more conservative majority. The unique feature of the Neelaambari was its finely spun yarn and high-quality dyeing. The hand-spun yarn used in its weaving was exceptionally translucent, giving the fabric a soft, powdery texture. A heady mix of delicate weaving and subtlety of design, the Neelaambari was the last word in sophistication. Cotton weaving also received extensive royal patronage along with muslin and jamdani weaving. While the fine muslins adorned the royal class, cotton or tāt sarees and dhotis were used for draping the common folk. This weaving tradition continued during the British rule, despite disturbances and disruptions, and the decades prior to independence witnessed an inflow of modern weaving techniques. Today, every tāt saree is characterized by the design on its border, pallav and body, using a variety of floral, paisley and other artistic motifs. Some of the popular traditional decorations are the bhomrā or the bumble

Right: Kantaji Temple panel depicting weaving woman. Image source: Haque, Zulekha, 2014.



bee, the tabij or the amulet, the ardha-candra or the half-moon, the chāndmālā or a garland of moons, the aansh or the fish scale, the hātī or the elephant, the ratan-cokh or the gem-eyed, the tārā or the star, the kalkā or the paisley, and of course, the all-time favourite phul or an elegant spray of flower motifs. In the history of textiles in Bengal, we cannot neglect the Bāluchari that came much after the introduction of the muslin. Two hundred years ago, Bāluchari sarees were woven in a small village called Bāluchar in the Murshidabad district. At the height of the 18th century, Murshidquali Khan, Nawab of Bengal, patronised its rich weaving tradition, imported the craft from Dhaka and encouraged the industry to flourish. However, after an unfortunate flood the industry moved to Bishnupur in the Bankura district. Here, it prospered in its new environs during the reign of the Malla dynasty. But this flourishing

trend later declined, especially during British rule, due to political and financial setbacks, and it became a dying craft as most of the weavers were compelled to give up the profession. Nevertheless, all these years later, this weaving tradition has gained new ground and Bāluchari sarees are treated as exclusive heirlooms where stylised forms of human and animal figures are most interestingly integrated with floral, foliage and geometrical motifs in the elaborate pallavs and thin, elegant borders. Known for their intricate designs, no other saree uses as many mythological patterns as the Bāluchari. They are dominated by characters from epics like the Ramayana and the Mahābhārata. These characters give a royal look to the fabric. Sarees depicting the story of Lord Krishna explaining the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna is, perhaps, one of the most popular designs. And yet there are other motifs that are

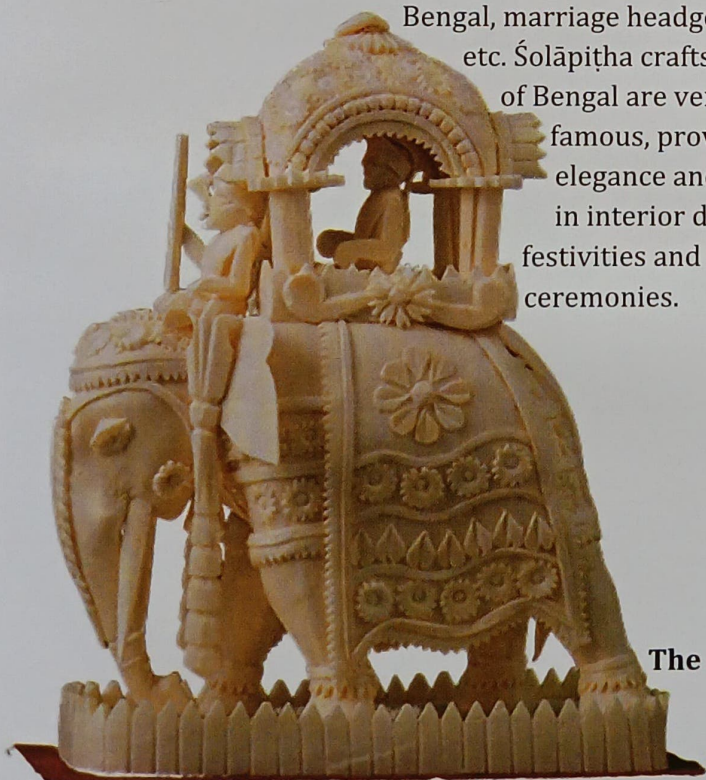


fashioned from everyday life in the Muslim courts and harems. This seamless straddling of two cultures is amazing. You can glimpse princess Sita with her maids, or a regal queen riding a horse holding a rose, or—most dramatically—seated on a chair, her legs stylishly crossed, a bibi or courtesan enjoying her hookah.

Śolāpiṭh craft

Śolāpiṭh is derived from a reed (Aeschyromene Aspere) found in the marshy wetlands of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Assam. The core of this reed is white in colour and gets exposed when the outer layer of the stalk is shaved. The core is light, porous, soft and pliable and can be shaped to suit the imagination of the artisans. The artisans mould this reed into multiple objects like models of churches, temples and mosques, carved images of Goddess Durga during Durga Puja in Bengal, marriage headgear etc. Śolāpiṭha crafts

of Bengal are very famous, providing elegance and style in interior decor, festivities and social ceremonies.

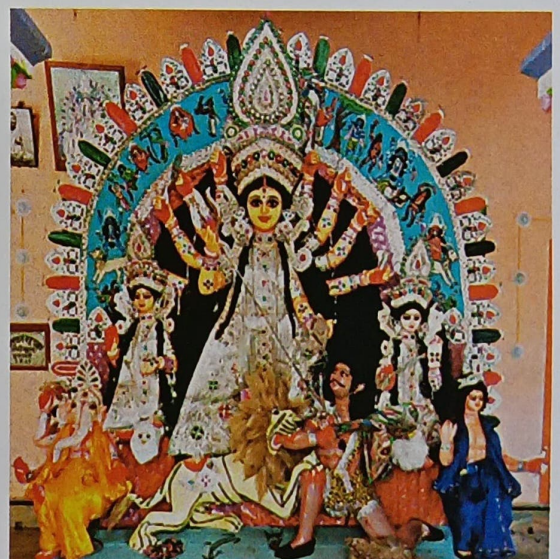


following are examples of Bengal's cultural heritage and practices that have been recognized on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

An intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a practice, representation, expression, knowledge, or skill considered by UNESCO to be part of a place's cultural heritage. Buildings, historic places, monuments, and artifacts are cultural property. Intangible heritage consists of nonphysical intellectual wealth, such as folklore, customs, beliefs, traditions, knowledge, and language. Intangible cultural heritage is considered by member states of UNESCO in relation to the tangible World Heritage focusing on intangible aspects of culture. In 2001, UNESCO made a survey among States and NGOs to try to agree on a definition, and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was drafted in 2003 for its protection and promotion.

Durgā Pūjā (দুর্গা পূজা) in Kolkata

was inscribed in December 2021 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by The



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as per the recommendations made



Left: Terracotta plaque of Mahiṣāsura-mardini.

Chhau Dance (চহু নৃত্য) of West Bengal

Bengal was inscribed in 2010 on the

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Nomination file No. 00337) as per the recommendations made in the Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee held in Nairobi, Kenya from 15 to 19 November 2010.

Chhau dance is a



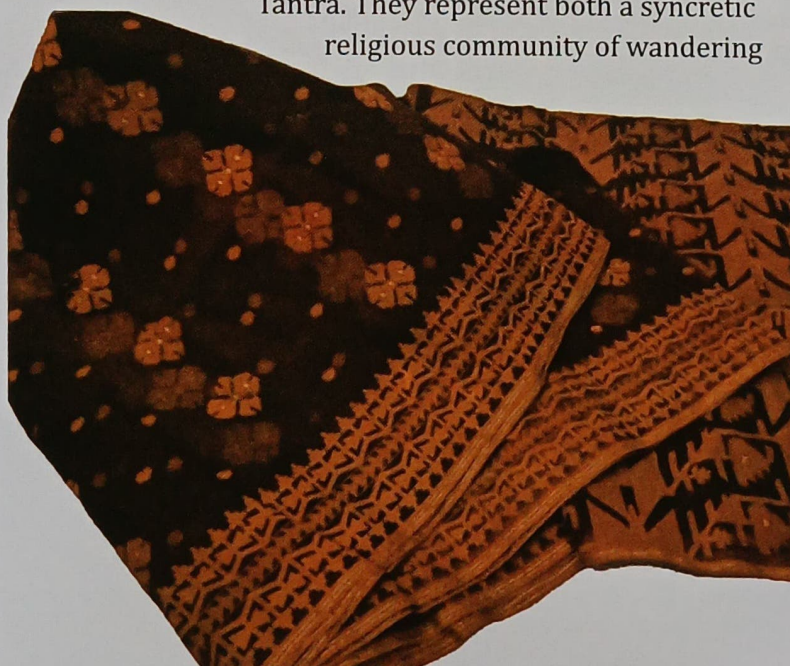
in UNESCO's Sixteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Nomination file No. 00703). Durga Puja is an annual festival celebrated magnificently marking the worship of the Hindu mother goddess Durga. This is the biggest festival in Kolkata. There were about 3,000 bārowāri pujas in Kolkata in 2022.

semi classical Indian dance with martial and folk traditions. The most prominent style of Chhau dance is the Purulia Chhau which is practised in the Purulia district of West Bengal.





Bāul Songs (বাউল গান) was inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as per the recommendations made in UNESCO's Third Session of the Intergovernmental Committee held in Istanbul from 4 to 8 November 2008 (Nomination file No. 00107, originally proclaimed in 2005). The Baul are a group of mystic minstrels from Bengal, blending elements of Sufism, Vaishnavism, and Tantra. They represent both a syncretic religious community of wandering



minstrels and a distinct musical tradition. The Bauls are a diverse group, made up of various sects, but the majority of their members are Vaishnava Hindus and Sufi Muslims.

Traditional art of Jāmdāni (জামদানী) weaving was inscribed in 2013 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as per the recommendations made in UNESCO's Eighth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee from 2 to 7 December 2013 in Baku, Azerbaijan (Nomination file No. 00879). Jamdani is a vividly patterned, sheer cotton fabric, traditionally woven on a handloom by craftspeople and apprentices around Dhaka. Jamdani textiles combine intricacy of design with muted or vibrant colours, and the finished garments are highly breathable. Jamdani is a time-consuming and labour-intensive form of weaving because of the richness of its motifs, which are created directly on the loom using the discontinuous weft technique.

Traditional art of Śītal Pāṭi (সীতপাতি) weaving was inscribed in 2017 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as per the recommendations made in UNESCO's Twelfth session of the Committee held in Jeju Island, Republic of Korea from 4 to 9 December 2017 (Nomination file No. Nomination file No. 01112). Śītal pāṭi is a kind of mat which feels cold by nature. It is made from murta plants (Schumannianthus dichotomus). It is usually used in the eastern and the

western part of Bengal. Mats with decorative designs are called nakṣi pāṭi (বক্সি পাটি).



Maṅgal Śobhājātrā (মাঙ্গল শোভাযাত্রা) on Pahela Baishakh (পহেলা বৈশাখ) was inscribed in 2016 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by The United Nations

Eleventh session of the Committee held in Addis Ababa from 28 November to 2 December 2016 (Nomination file No. 01091). Maṅgal Śobhājātrā is a mass procession that takes place at dawn on the first day of the Bengali New Year both in West Bengal and Bangladesh. The festival is considered an expression of the secular identity of the Bengali people and as a way to promote unity.

GI Tags

Following items have been added to the list of GI Tags in India. GI refers to Geographical Indications which is assigned to a certain product that has a specific geographical origin and possesses

qualities, a reputation, or characteristics that are essentially attributable to that place of origin is assigned a GI Tag of that location. It came into force with effect from 15th September 2003.



Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as per the recommendations made in UNESCO's

Darjeeling Tea was the first Indian product to get a GI tag.



S.No	Geographical Indication	Type
1.	Darjeeling Tea (word & logo)	Agricultural
2.	Nakshi Kantha	Handicraft
3.	Laxman Bhog Mango	Agricultural
4.	Himsagar(Khirsapati Mango)	Agricultural
5.	Fazli Mango	Agricultural
6.	Santipore Saree	Handicraft
7.	Baluchari Saree	Handicraft
8.	Dhaniakhali Saree	Handicraft
9.	Santiniketan Leather Goods	Handicraft
10.	Joynagar Moa	Foodstuff
11.	Bardhaman Sitabhog	Foodstuff
12.	Bardhaman Mihidana	Foodstuff
13.	Gobindobhog Rice	Agricultural
14.	Tulapanji Rice	Agricultural
15.	Bangla Rasogolla	Foodstuff
16.	Bankura Panchmura Terracotta Craft	Handicraft
17.	Bengal Dokra	Handicraft
18.	Bengal Patachitra	Handicraft
19.	Purulia Chau Mask	Handicraft
20.	Wooden Mask of Kushmandi	Handicraft
21.	Madur Kathi	Handicraft

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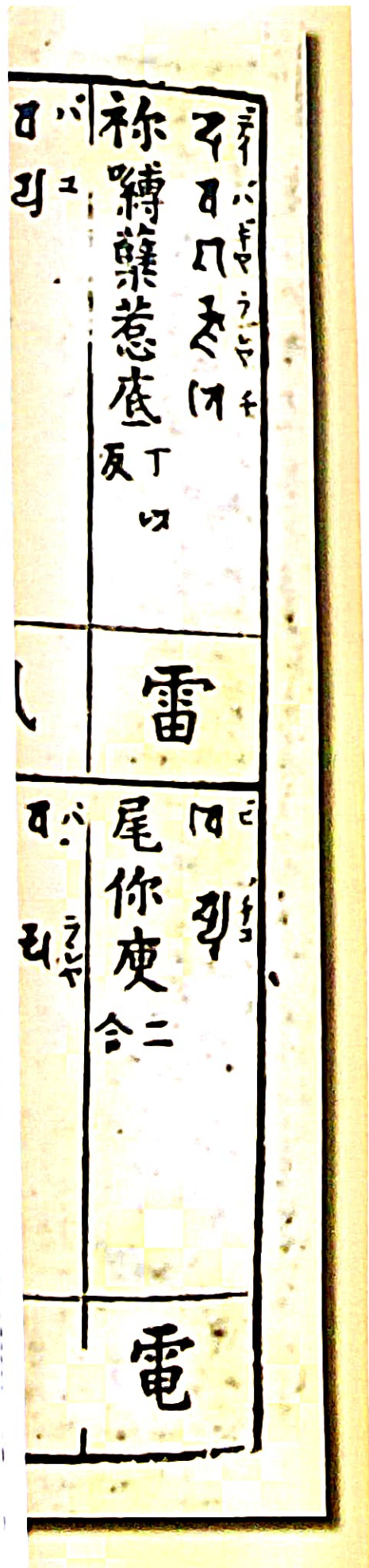
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Chapter Eight

Bangla Language: Its Origin and Heritage

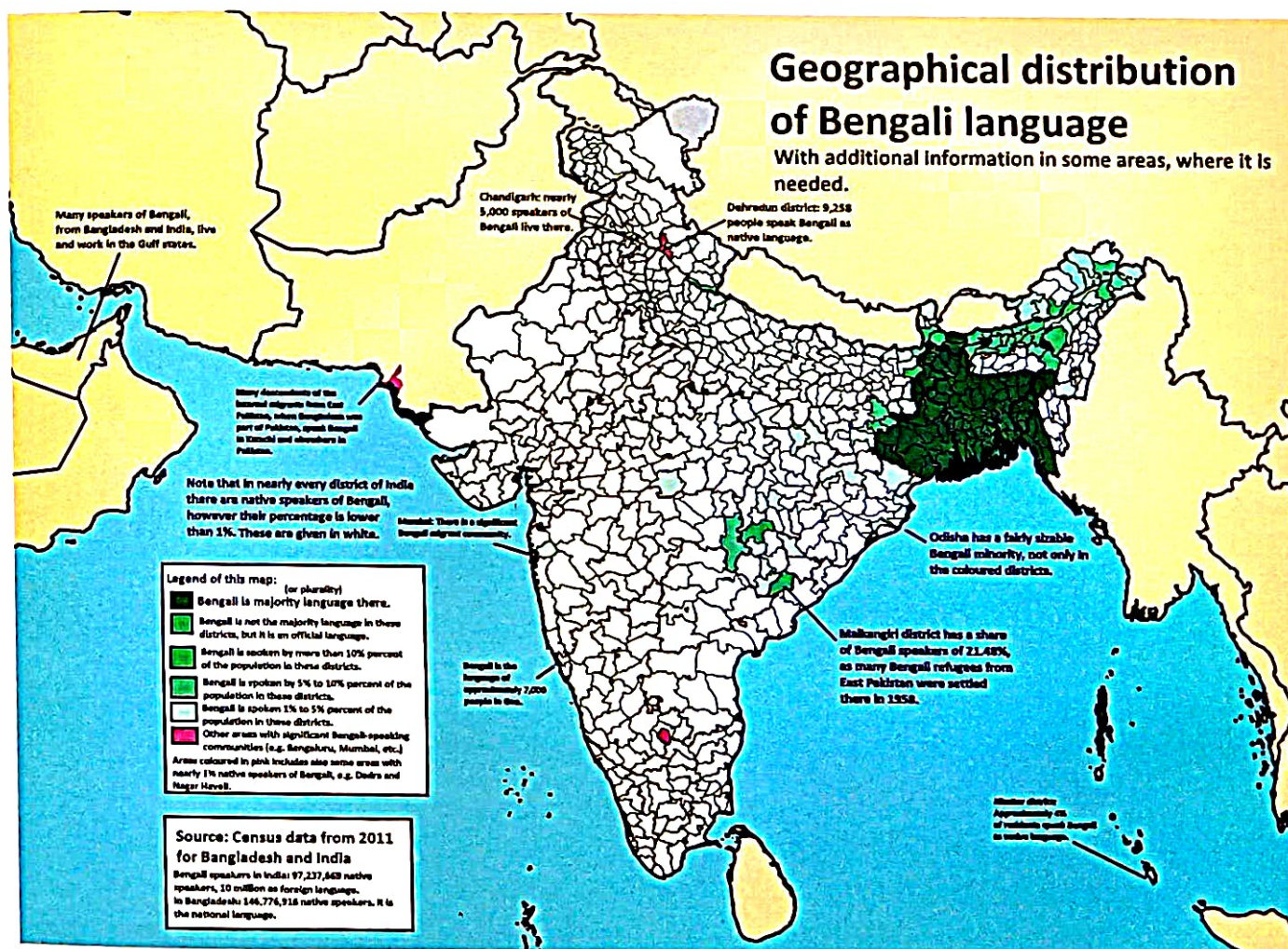
Amitava Das
Rajib Chakraborty



Generally 'Bangla' (or Bengali) is historically and genealogically regarded as an eastern Indo-Aryan language with around 178.2 million speakers in Bangladesh (98% speakers), and 83.4 million speakers in the Indian states of West Bengal (68.37 million), Tripura (2.15 million), South Assam (7.3 million), Odisha (0.49 million) and Delhi (0.21 million) as well as in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (close to a hundred thousand) – accounting for 8.3% of India. It is a major language in Jharkhand (2.6 million), too and a language with a sizable population in Bihar (0.44 million). Apart from these, there are a huge number of Bangla-speaking Diasporas spread all over the world. It is the seventh largest spoken and written language in the world. Bangla is the national and official

Below: Distribution of Bengali language

Source: census data from 2011 for Bangladesh



language of Bangladesh, and one of the 22 Official languages in India (listed in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution). It is also one of the official languages of Sierra Leone. The script is also called Bangla, which is an eastern variety of the Brāhmī Writing System, written from left to right. Historically it derives from the Brāhmī alphabet as used in the Aśokan inscriptions (269-232 BCE).

Bangla and its cognate languages, as mentioned above, together form a linguistic group known as the Eastern New Indo-Aryan (NIA). There is a gross inadequacy of the inscriptions and manuscripts in the Eastern Apabhraṃśa or 'Avahatṭha' except for small inscriptions and the manuscripts of the Tantric Buddhist text titled Caryyāgītikoṣa or the Caryā-Padadating back to the 7th-11th century. As a result, there is not much epigraphic evidence for the development of its writing system.

It is evident that Bengal has its long history of culture as recorded in several archaeological sites like Chandraketugarh, Puṇḍravardhana, Mahasthangarh, Tāmralipta etc. The anthropological data also explores that the Bengali people are unique and different from main stream Aryans. If so, we have to re-think about the hypothesis regarding the origin and development of the Bengali language. The identification of Bengali as a Neo Indo-Aryan language is a colonial one but linguistically it is not possible that before Aryan influence or invasion in the 6th century CE. there was no existence of Bengali people or language. As in a linguistically contact situation, usually the dominant language or the language of the ruler only enriches the sub-stratum by sharing lexicon and vocabularies and sometimes few morphological items. On the other hand, the sub-stratum, here it is Bengali, retains its main syntactic structure and morphological and phonological pattern of its own. That's why under the British rule Bengali language had taken so many loan words from English and nativized those as per the phonological patterns of Bangla. E.g.

Eng. school /sku:l/ > Bangla /iʃ.kul/, Eng. table /tebəl/ > Bangla /te.bil/, etc. Under the Mughal empire, the Suba Bangla had also borrowed so many Persian words in its vocabulary. Similarly, before the Mughal era the Bengali language was enriched with huge Arabic words and other morphological items. In this entire course of mutual influence, Bangla never lost its own syntactic, morphological and phonological order or identity. In case of borrowing whenever the native language faces difficulties of foreign pronunciation due to phonemes unknown to its phonological inventory the process of phonological nativization occurs. The Arabic-Persian sound 'Z' is replaced by the native 'J' such as zami > B. jami, hazar > B. hajar etc. The syllabic structure of Perso-Arabic words also changed to that of Bangla. E.g., Arabic monosyllabic word /ʃɔrt/ "condition" became a bisyllabic in Bangla /ʃɔr.to/. Bangla also borrowed a number of Perso-Arabic morphological elements (endings) which became productive in Bangla word formation. E.g., Persian endings like -dār, -khānā, etc. are used profusely in Bangla to form new words like jamidār, pāonādār, dāktārkhānā, etc.

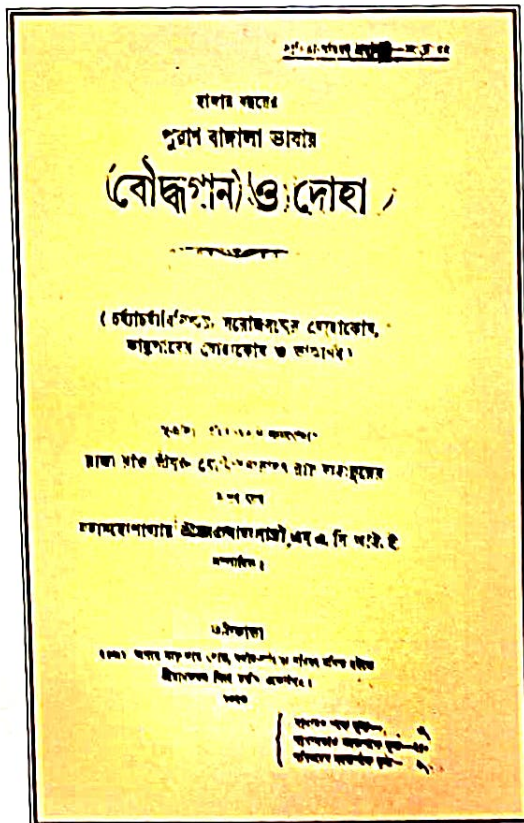
Bengali, from the linguistic point of view, is different phonologically, morphologically as well as syntactically from the Old Indo-Aryan. Its phonological pattern (segmental and supra segmental) is quite unique. Vowel length is not phonological in Bangla—it has no long vowel (*dirghaī, dirgha ū*). ai and au are not uttered as a single vowel, rather both are diphthong in Bengali, a closing diphthong in nature with vowel + semi-vowel phonological construction. Even ɟ and ɟ̌ sounds are uttered in Bengali as

consonant + vowel structure, i.e. r+i, l+i respectively. Apart from this difference from OIA, Bengali has its own unique vowel sounds, e.g., /æ/ as in ʈʰ Lɪ/dækha/, GKɪ/æka/, eʔKɪ/bæka/, bʔKɪ/næka/, etc. In Bengali there is no consonant sound like ñ (T, alveolar nasal stop). The language doesn't allow sounds like ɳ (Y). y (h) is uttered like j(R). There is no separate sound for antaḥstha ba. Palatal ś is dominant over its dental and mūrdhanya (cerebral) counterparts, like other eastern varieties. The most commonly used syllabic structures in Bangla are V, CV, VC, CVC and the phonological changes generally occur in favour of this syllabic structure., e.g., Skt. strī > Bangla /is.ti.ri/, English school > Bangla BkKj /if.kul/

Bengali is not in favour of *Sandhi* but it prefers a phonological situation like 'hiatus' to it or uses suffixes to avoid Sandhi and compounding, e.g., ebc_ bonopɔth/>eʔbi c_/boner pɔth/, ʰki_cĀ/dɔforɔthputtro/>ʰki_ʔi cĀ/dɔforɔtherputtro/, etc. From the morphological point of view, the verb forms of Bengali are more simple and does not depend on the grammatical category like gender, number etc. The usage of adjectives is also independent and it is not conditioned by the following noun as far as its gender and number are concerned, which is unlike Sanskrit. Most of all the Bengali syntax is positional compared to that of OIA languages which are inflectional in nature.

Below: Title page of
Hājāra Bacharera
Purāṇa Bāṅgālā
Bhāṣyā Bauddhagāṇa
O Dohā

The morpho-phonemic process like Sandhi is very regular and profound in Sanskrit. But the salient feature of



From the Prosodic point of view in Sanskrit it is yadākṣaram tac chandam but in Bengali the prosodic pattern is mainly Moraic or syllabic. In the oral tradition the rhymes are mostly syllabic while in the written text the prosodic trend is generally mixed Moraic starting from the oldest written evidence so far of Bengali literature Caryāpada where the prototype of modern payar is found as Pādakulaka. e.g.,

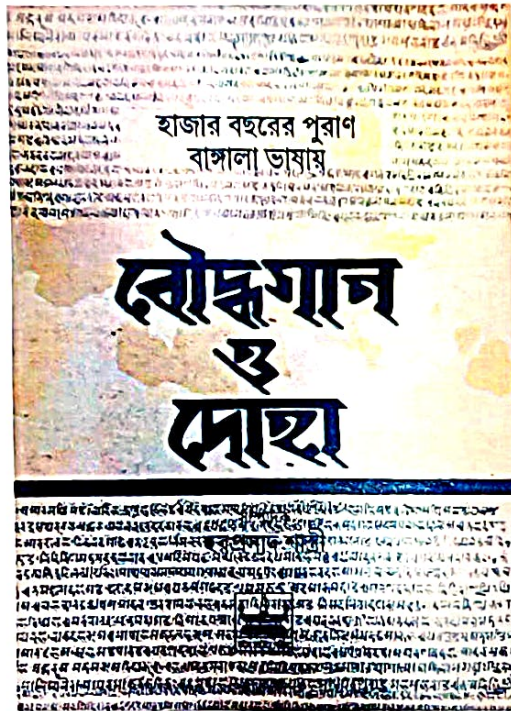
Kɪ Aɪ Ziʰei cĀ ɪe Wɪj
PĀj ɪPG ʰcv Kɪj
(kā ā taruvara pañcabi dāla l
cañcala cie paiṭha kāla ll)
cf.
gnɪfriʔZi K_ɪ AgZ mɪɪb |
Kɪkɪɪgʱ m Kɪn iʔb cYɪɪb ||

It is very possible that these features have a pre-Aryan root. The evidence of the existence of Bengali people, their culture, their involvement in maritime trade also a mark of evidence of the existence of Bengali language. The origin of Bengali language, we may conclude,

must be pre-Aryan but in its course of development, from the 6th century A.D it is influenced mainly by Sanskrit. This influence, in a contact situation has an impact primarily in the vocabulary of Bengali language and as a result not only *tatsama* words are accumulated in the Bengali vocabulary but also this lexical diffusion resulted in diachronic change by developing *ardhatatsama* and *tadbhava* words. In the similar way, phonological nativization has taken place in case of borrowing of Arabic, Persian, English and other foreign words in the direction of phonological and syllabic pattern of the native language. So, the influence of other languages including OIA is external and the Bengali language retains its own core grammatical structure.

Stages of Development

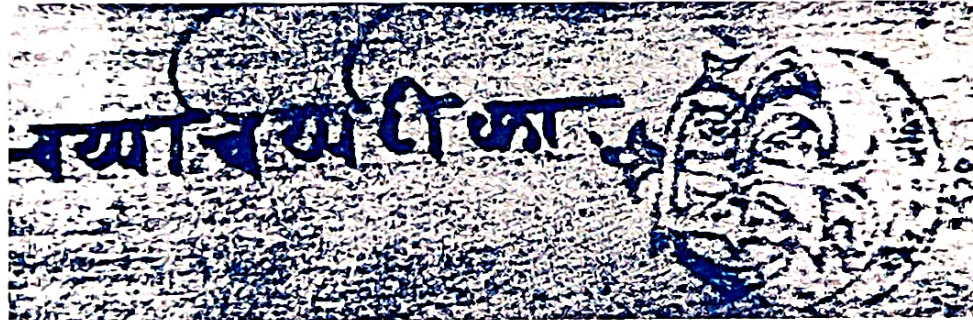
Historically, the Bangla language is divided into three periods as evident from various sources:



Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāya Bauddhagāṇa O Dohā. This manuscript included

Caryācaryaviniścaya, the *Dohākoṣa* of *Sarohavajra*, the *Dohākoṣa* of *Kāṇhapāda* and *ḍākārṇava*. What Śāstrī called *Caryācaryaviniścaya* was mentioned as *Āścaryacaryācaya*. This is a collection of

Top: Title page of Hājāra Bacharera Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāya Bauddhagāṇa O Dohā



50 songs by 23 poets. As some of the pages of the

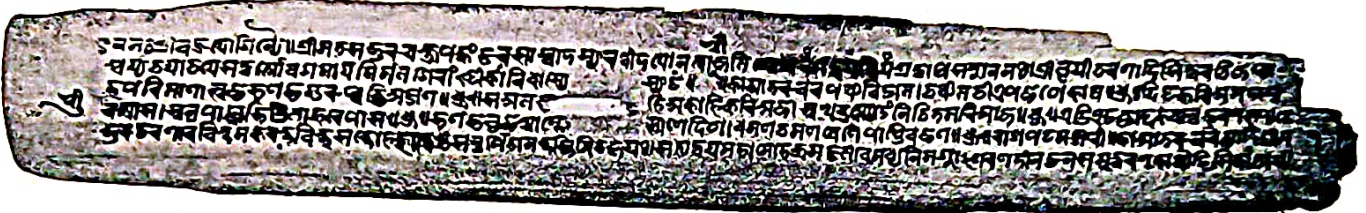
Left: Image of folio of caryā

(i) First, Old Bangla Period (roughly CE4th/7th Century to CE 1200/1350). The late Mahāmahopādhyāya Haraprasāda Śāstrī discovered the original text of the Buddhist Mystic Songs with its Sanskrit commentary from a unique manuscript obtained from Nepal in 1907. This was published from Vaṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat, Calcutta in 1916 AD under the title *Hājāra Bacharera*

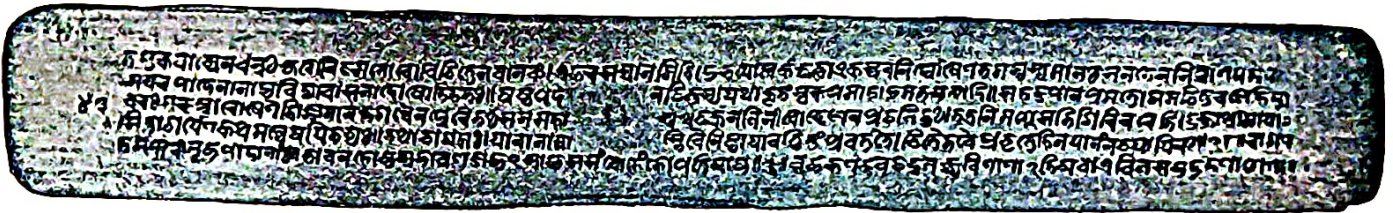
manuscript are missing, we have 47 songs by 22 poets. *Caryās* are the short musical compositions to be sung with a peculiar tune (*rāga*) mentioned at the heading of each. The name of the *padakartā* (composer) is mentioned at the end of each *caryā*. As a literary piece, it is the origin of the later Vaishnavite Sanskrit and vernacular songs in one hand and the Persian ghazals on the other.

The Date of Caryā: The lineage and the time of existence of the Padakartās would definitely ascertain the date of the composition of the Caryā songs. As has already been mentioned that there were originally 50 songs composed by 23 poets. Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura (circa 1325 A.D.) in his Maithili work Varṇaratnākara mentioned about 21 of these poets in the list of eighty-four siddhas omitting Guṇḍarī and Tāḍaka.

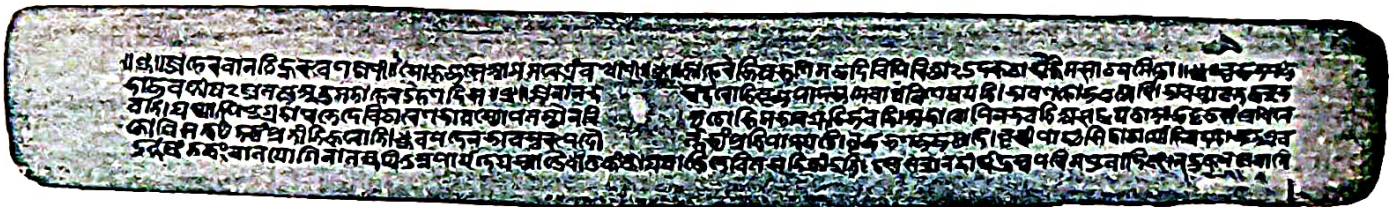
Of all the 23 poets Lūyipāda is author of two songs (Caryā 1 & 29).



(Caryā 1)



(Caryā 29[1])

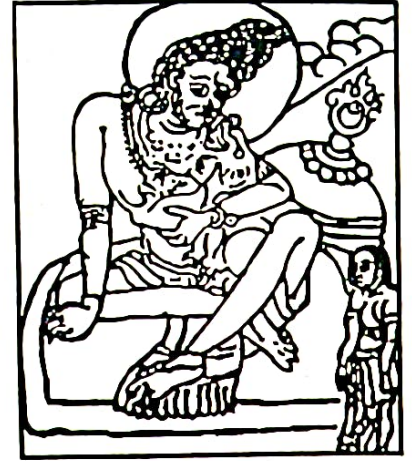


(Caryā 29[2])

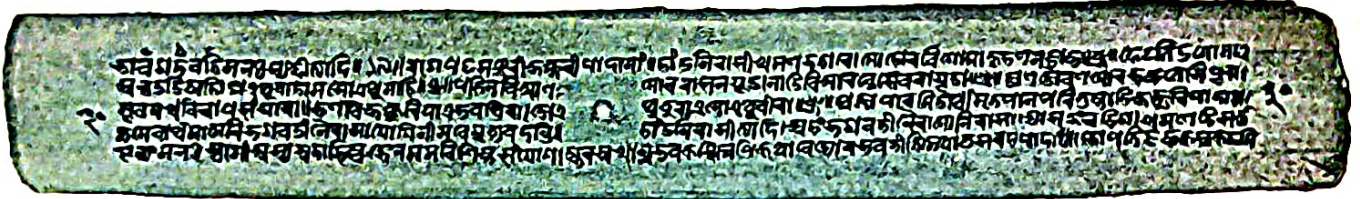


Lūyi hails from Bengal. Rāhula Sāṃkṛtyāyana following a Tibetan book (written in 1233-1279AD) gives the line of gurus as follows: (Mahābrāhmaṇa) Saraha—(Nāgārjuna)—(Śabarapā)—Lūyipā—Dārikapā—(Vajraghaṇṭapā)—(Kūrmapāda)—Jālandharapā—(Kāṇhācāryapā)—Guhyapā—(Vijayapā)—Telopā—Nāropā. The time of Lūyi can be ascertained by the date of his guru Śabara who helped him to write two books for Kamalaśīla. Kamalaśīla went to Tibet in 762 AD at the invitation of King Khri-Sron ideu-bcen. So Śabara must have lived before him. His date may be approximately fixed between 680 and 760 AD. His disciple Lūyipā must have lived between 730 and 810 AD. According to Rāhula Sāṃkṛtyāyana Lūyipā was the Kāyastha or writer of King Dharmapāla (770-810 AD).

Right: Sketch of
Kukkuripāda



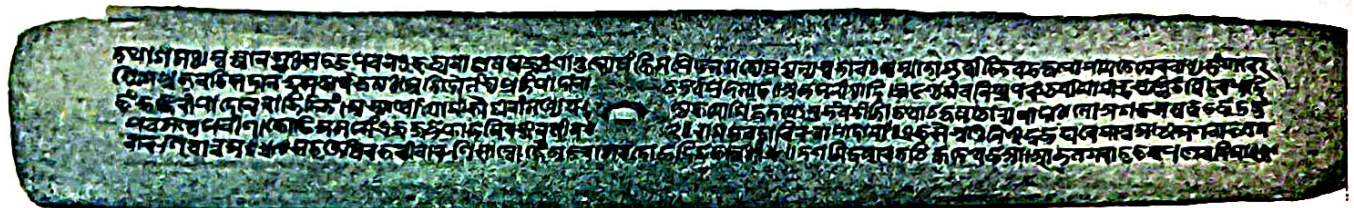
Kukkuripāda: According to Vajrayoginīguruparamparā the following is the line of gurus: Lūyipā—Kukkuripā—Indrabhūti—Lakṣmīkarā—Biruvā. According to Lāmā Tāranātha, Kukurī was a contemporary of King Dharmapāla (770-810 AD). Indrabhūti was the foster-father of Padmasambhava who was in Tibet till 802 AD. His time is approximately 700 to 780 AD. Kukuripā was an inhabitant of Bengal. He is the author of three songs 2, 20 and 48 (the last is missing in the text). He lived approximately between 740 and 820 AD.



Right: Sketch of
Biruvāpāda

(Caryā 20)

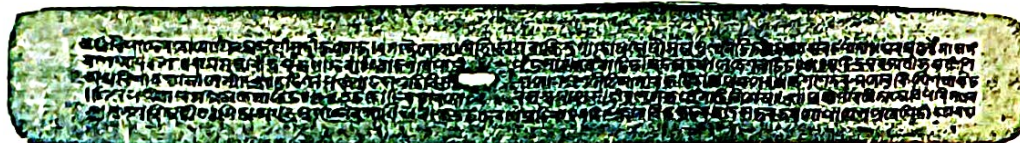
Biruvāpāda—Biruvā was born in Tripurā, the Kingdom of Devapāla. He was for sometime in the Somapurī monastery in Varendra. Pāhārpur in North Bengal has been identified with Somapurī. His disciple was Ḍombipāda. He flourished probably during the reign of King Devapāla (810-850 AD). He is the author of the song no. 3 of Caryā.



Right: Image of
Bhusuku

(Caryā 3)

Bhusuku—Bhusuku is the author of eight songs. In his song no. 49, he mentions Pauākḥālā (Padmā Khālī) and Banga Deśa. Evidently he was an inhabitant of East Bengal. He flourished in the second quarter of the 11th AD.



(Caryā 49)



Top: Image of Kāṇhapā

Kāṇhapā—Kāṇhapā, the author of 13 songs, lived in the Somapurī monastery in Northern Bengal, which is modern Pāhārpur. In the legend of king Gopīcandra, he is associated with Jālandharīpā who was disguised as a scavenger and hence called Hāṛipā. According to Tāranātha, Jālandharī

converted Bhartṛhari. According to Yijing Bhartṛhari died in 651. So Kāṇhapā, a disciple of Jālandharīpā may be placed in the second half of the 7th Century AD.

Right: Painting of Amoghavajra

Dhāmapāda or Dharmapāda was a disciple of Kāṇhapā. He was of the Brāhmaṇa caste of Vikramapura, now in Bangladesh.

By and large, on the basis of the evidences and arguments made above, it can be deduced with certainty that the Caryā songs started being composed right from first half of the 7th Century AD. The noted Indologist Prof. Jules Bloch pointed out in his preface to Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah's dissertation titled *Textes Pour l'Etude du Bouddhisme Tardif Less Chants Mystiques de Kanha et de Saraha les Doha-Kosa* that Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah's research shows with certainty that "Bengali becomes the most anciently attested language among the modern languages of India."

In a Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary compiled by Li-Yen bears testimony to the fact that at least 51 Bangla words made their way into that dictionary. The Chinese words are written in the oracle bone script and the Sanskrit



words are in Siddham script. Li Yen was contemporary of Amoghavajra and had worked with him. Amoghavajra was a prolific translator who became one of the most politically powerful Buddhist monks in Chinese history and is acknowledged as one of the eight patriarchs of the doctrine in Shingon Buddhism. Born and raised in China, Li Yen, at the age of 10, was admitted into the saṅgha by Vajrabodhi and became his disciple in 719. In 741 Amoghavajra and some of his associates left China or rather were expelled from China and they started visiting countries like Sri Lanka, Indo China and India. **We must not forget that maritime trade between India and China dates back to as early as the first two decades of the third century AD. Travellers used to travel for more than a year from China to India until they reached the mouth of the river Ganges.** (Ref Shui-Ching-Chu sec 55, on the basis of the text of Fu-Nan-Chuan of Kang Tai). The mouth

of the river Ganges was an area which belonged to the Chinese rulers under the kingdom of Tan-Mei. Tan-Mei has been taken by the author of shui-ching-chu as identical with To-Mo-Li-Chen i.e. Tamralipti. China sent ambassador often through this trade routes for trade talks between India and China and vice-versa under the reign of Tamralipti. Thus, the mouth of the river Ganges and the area of Bengal played a significant role in strengthening and fostering India-China maritime relation (240-245 AD). This trade route was an ever-flourishing route in which both counterparts India (Bengal to be more precise) people from all parts of India and Chinese businessmen were on the same ship for the return journey via Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Li-yen has often mentioned an area north-west of India again and again and called it koutcha. It is quite possible that Li-Yen had taken the same route while his journey to and fro from India to China. Faxian (399-414 AD) a Chinese traveller in his travel journey mentions of 200 merchantmen or 200 brahmana taking part in the journey from west coast of India. This sea route reached the supremacy during the rule of Gupta period which is also mentioned in the texts or lexicon of Li-Yen. The Bengali words found in this



Top: Title page of Deux Lexiques Sanskrit_Chinois

dictionary are contemporary to *Caryāpada*. Professor Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, the then Professor at the University of Calcutta, published this dictionary under his editorship with the title *Deux Lexiques Sanskrit Chinois Tome 1* from Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner in the year 1929.

The dictionary also has a second volume published by the same publication house from Paris in 1937.

The Geographical and Historical data incorporated in the Lexicon edited by P.C. Bagchi were originally written in French for the publication house based in Paris in 1937.

The geographical area attested by Fan Yut Sa Ming denotes Serindian inspiration.

Li Yen's knowledge of the Indian geography seems to be very limited. He mentions Madhyadeśa, Magadhavisaya, Rājagṛha, Cravasti (Srāvastī) and Kapilāvaṣṭu, but probably on the basis of ancient texts, as appears from the Chinese transcription of these names. That's all Li-yen knows about India in particular.

On the other hand, his (Li yen) information on the outside world is richer. His list begins with the expressions pien-ti-pratyatika=pratyantika "the bordering countries", pientijen-mleccha "the people of the bordering countries" and tch'ou-tchou -sthana "places". Then he goes on to enumerate the countries.

He begins with han-kouo-cinadeca, and that does not surprise us.

Li yen was in china when he compiled his lexicon and that is probably why he begins with China. But it is interesting to find the designation "pays de Han" means country of the Han for China under the reign of T'ang. then t'ien-tchoukouo-indudeca, India; po-sseu-parasi, Persia; and others.

The t'ou-kiue were called trusakagana=turuskagana; gana (horde) which literally means "multitude" is probably used here to designate the multiple and nomadic tribes of the Turkish people, as a man of the country could know them. 'Central Asia.

Next to Persia and the T'ou-kiue, li yen mentions the Hou=Suli.

The word hou generally designated "the barbarians" until the end of the 6th century.

The Chinese began to exclude the T'ou-kiue and the Hindus from this category of "barbarians"

In the geographical list of the Candragarbha sutra studied by M. Levi, n° 31 is chou-li-kia=culika, and further

on, there is question of another country, the sou-li. same country, culika. Hiuan-tsang mentioned the country of sou-li. According to gauthiot, sou-li would be phonetically suydik, sogdiana. the Tibetan and Sanskrit name is culik.

Then Li-yen mentions ki-pen for which he gives the Sanskrit form karpicaya; but the correct form must have been kapticaya. souei (581-617) the country of ki-pin seems to have been poorly known to the Chinese.

It reappeared under the t'ang and was identified at that time not with kacmir but with kapica. Li yen makes this distinction and mentions kacmir separately as kia-cha-mi-lo=kacamira=kacmir.

Probable conclusions:

1. Li-yen, a disciple of Amoghavajra, tried hard and fast to follow the lexicographical systems taught by Amoghavajra. So, Li-Yen has borrowed his system of transcription which is mostly identical in all aspects as far as the compilation is concerned.

2. To explain the large number of Prakrit words, the grammatical forms, the pronouns, and above all some peculiarities of the use of the nasals n<nd, n<d, it is undoubtedly necessary to admit the influence of a language from the north-west of India.

3. From the palaeographical point of view, the Siddham used in this lexicon presents two varieties of n. But we have seen that this could be possible in a period of transition towards the end of the eighth century when the old form of

n was not yet out of use although the new form was used more frequently.

4. It is probable that Li-Yen had old materials. We have seen that there is a trace of a lexicographical order in his vocabulary, an order often disturbed by reorganizations. This vocabulary was not of a religious order but seems to have been intended for merchants and travellers.

5. Therefore it is permitted, without prejudice, to reconstitute the history of the text as follows:

i) *Original Sanskrit text*- compiled in Northwest India, it was divided into well-defined sections (varga). The Prakrit and Iranian words may have been in use in the region. It is possible that the vocabulary has undergone several alterations in this same region. However, it does not seem to be earlier than the 7th century.

ii) *Reworked Sanskrit text*- the original lexicon seems to have been brought to koutcha where it underwent various re-workings. It is at this time that the graphic confusions occurred and that the Sanskrit words suffered the influence of the local language. Actually, in a contact situation borrowing takes place due to two reasons: (a) need filling motive and (b) prestige filling motive. Lexical diffusion from the language of the rulers to the language of the ruled often takes place due to prestige motive while any new administrative or business situation causes borrowing on the basis of need filling motive of different domains. If we consider *Caryāpada* as the first written evidence of Bengali language and literature so far, we cannot draw a naïve conclusion that the origin of



the spoken language is a contemporary one. On the other hand, the spoken and oral literature is the primary evidence of a culture and the description of *Buddhanāṭaka* in *Caryāpada* indicates that it is a regular event or ritual which is carried out through tradition. The legend of Cāḍ Saudāgara in *Manasāmaṅgala* and the narrative of Dhanapati Saudāgar and 'Śrīmanta Saudāgara' in the *Baṇik-*

Top: Sculpture of Buddha,

Image source: Haque and Gail (2008) Lexiques Sanskrit_Chinois

iii) The compilation of Li-Yen - this Sanskrit text seems to have been collected by Li-Yen at Koutcha and was brought to China. It was at Tch'ang-ngan that he added translations and Chinese transcriptions before his death around 789 AD.

The Chinese-Sanskrit dictionary, compiled in the 8th Century CE, included or rather was compelled to include words of a third language, i.e., Bangla. This is indicative of the fact that Bangla had already been standardized and was one of the influential tongues which was regarded as the lingua franca of the geographic area that was known as Bengal. This illustrates with absolute certainty that Bangla must

Right: Image from Deux
Lexiques Sanskrit_
Chinois

The list of Bangla words that are found the Chinese-Sanskrit lexicon is placed below—

(PC Bagchi) *Ming*

Sl. No.	Chinese Script	Siddham Script	Roman transliteration	Bangla	Modern Bengali Pronunciation with English Meaning
1.	摩訶	マハ	maśo (< Skt. śmaśru)	মশো	moch (=moustache)
2.	輪上	フナ	śuna (< Skt. śṇu)	শুন	śono [= (you) hear]
3.	摩訶	マハ	moṭṭa (< Skt. mahattā)	মোট	moṭā (=thick/ fat)
4.	素	ス	dukha (< Skt. duḥkha)	দুখ	dukh (=sorrow)
5.	阿	ア	acche (< Skt. āste)	অছে	āche [= (it) exists]
6.	馬	マ	upara (< Skt. ūrdhva)	উপর	upor (=above)
7.	吉	キ	ki jani (< Skt. ko jānāti)	কি জানি	ke jāne (=who knows)
8.	聖	セ	triśa (< Skt. triṃśa)	ত্রিশ	tiriś (=thity)
9.	四	シ	catvariśa (< Skt. catvāriṃśa)	চত্বরিশ	cautriś (=thirtyfour)
10.	迦	カ	kaci (< Skt. kaṣaṇa)	কচি	koci (=small/tiny)

Sl. No.	Chinese	Siddham	Roman transliteration	Bangla	Modern Bengali Pronunciation with English Meaning
11.	藤 糸	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮	tela (< Skt. taila)	তেল	tel (=oil)
12.	稻 引 糧	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	cola (< Skt. taṇḍula)	চোল	cāl (=rice)
13.	母 識	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	muga (< Skt. mudga)	মুগ	mug (=mung bean)
14.	婆 多 引 糧	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	bhatāra (< Skt. bhartā)	ভতার	bhātār (=husband)
15.	迦 羅 伽 律 經	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	karama (kalama)	করম	kalam (=pen)
16.	熱 哩 火	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	gr̥ṣa (<Skt. gr̥iṣma)	গৃষ	grīśśa (=summer)
17.	尼 迦 律 入	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	vikala (<Skt. vikāla)	বিকল	bikel (=afternoon)
18.	補 伽 羅 經	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	purana (<Skt. purāṇa)	পুরন	purono (=old)
19.	離 羅	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	gara (ghara< Skt. gr̥ha)	গর	ghar (=home)
20.	伽 陀	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	khaṭa (<Skt. khaṭvā)	খট	khāṭ (=bed)
21.	波 引 經	𑖳𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮𑖪𑖫𑖮	pāṇi (<Skt. pāṇiya)	পানি	pāni (=water)

Sl. No.	Chinese	Siddham	Roman transliteration	Bangla	Modern Bengali Pronunciation with English Meaning
22.	阿摩	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	āma (<Skt. āmra)	আম	ām (=mango)
23.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	vakara (<Skt. barkara)	বকর	bokri (=goat)
24.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	kukura (<Skt. kukkura)	কুকুর	kukur (=dog)
25.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	nakura (<Skt. nakula)	নকুর	nokur (=mongoose)
26.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	sapa (<Skt. sarpa)	সপ	sāp (=snake)
27.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	pipṛka (<Skt. pipīlaka)	পিপ্ৰক	pipḍe (=ant)
28.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	haṇi (<Skt. haṇḍikā)	হনি	hāḍi (=handi)
29.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	karahi (<Skt. kaṭāha)	করহি	kaḍāi (=karahi)
30.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	bhiṇṭa (<Skt. bhitti)	ভিট	bhiṭā (=ancestral home)
31.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	kuṣṭi (<Skt. koṣṭha)	কুষ্টি	kuṣṭi (=astrological chart)
32.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	haṭa (<Skt. haṭṭa)	হট	hāṭ (=village market)
33.	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖞	chaṇa (Bengali chāḍā?)	ছণ	chāḍā (=without)

(PC Bagchi) Wen

Sl. No.	Chinese Script	Siddham Sript	Roman transliteration	Bangla	Modern Bangla Pronunciation with English meaning
1.	阿伊舍	𑖀𑖩𑖫𑖪	āiśa	আইশ	eso [= (you) come]
2.	囉伊	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	lāi (<nāi<nāhi<sneha)	লাই	lāi (=indulgence)
3.	郎跋羅	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	upara	উপর	upor (=above)
4.	娑羅	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	sala (< Skt. śyāla)	সল	śālā (=brother in law)
5.	阿多	𑖀𑖩𑖫𑖪	ata (< Skt. iyat)	অত	ato [= (that) amount]
6.	迦囉摩	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	kalama	কলম	kalom (=pen)
7.	菩吒	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	moṭṭa	মোট	moṭa (=thick/fat)
8.	束多	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	śukta (< Skt. śuṣkapatra)	শুক	śukto (Bengali cuisine)
9.	羅移	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	rāyī [<Skt. rāja(sarṣapa)]	রায়া	rāi (=mustard greens)
10.	解拏	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	pheḍa	ফেড়	pher (=again, change)
11.	竭吒	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	khaṭṭa	খট	khāṭ (=bed)
12.	折陸	𑖢𑖩𑖫𑖪	caṭṭu	চটু	cāṭu (=frying pan)

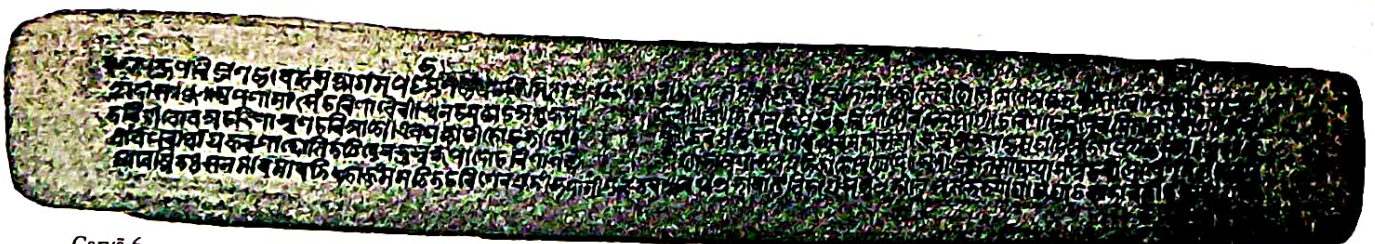
Sl. No.	Chinese Script	Siddham Sript	Roman transliteration	Bangla	Modern Bangla Pronunciation
13.	左: 筛! 你!	𑖦: 𑖦: 𑖦.	callani (<Skt. calanī)	চল্লনি	cāl̥ni (=sieve)
14.	𑖦𑖦	𑖦 𑖦.	kapa (<Skt. kampa)	কপ	kāpā (=to shiver)
15.	𑖦𑖦	𑖦 𑖦.	bhalla (<Skt. bhadra)	ভল্ল	bhālo (=good, gentle)
16.	𑖦: 𑖦𑖦 𑖦𑖦	𑖦 𑖦. 𑖦.	kṣetu (<Skt. kṣetra)	ক্ষেতু	khet (=agriculture land)
17.	𑖦𑖦𑖦	𑖦 𑖦. 𑖦.	aṁvṛ (<Skt. amla)	অংব্	ambal (=sour, acidity)
18.	𑖦𑖦𑖦	𑖦. 𑖦. 𑖦.	ṭakura	টকুর	ṭhākur (=god)

The language of Caryāpada

Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sahidullah, Prof. Sukumar Sen proved with certainty that the language of Caryā has the typical characteristic features of Bangla.

- The stress pattern of words in Caryā songs truly represents the stress pattern of Bangla. In most of the eastern varieties of Neo Indo-Aryan languages, the final and the penultimate syllables get the primary stress. But in Caryā, the word stress falls on the first syllable which resulted in the lengthening of the short vowels of the initial syllables. E.g. *nāhā*, *bāṭā*, *āhārā*, *bāhabā*, etc. (cf. *cakā*, *pakhā*, *ahār*, *apaṇā*, etc.). In Bangla, the first syllable bears the word-stress.
- The case affixes used in Caryā are characteristic of Bangla.

e.g. **Objective Case:** The objective case endings -re, -ere, -rē are used for both direct and indirect objects as in *kāhere*(Caryā 6 & 29),



Caryā 6

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

विभादेनेहमाध्यायिभवत्। शिवइयंमुदमुद्ययं॥मलवकुड्याविषयपुत्राभर्त्तावकडुनवयोवर्गनिदि।कप्रवावडादिपुत्रकुपुत्रज
 ३) विषयमवदयभर्त्ताविमुदलाकुलादिताडुवयवहमा॥मलकाभुयमालानंमलायवदमादिहउवभलनमावकाविहमाकाकुपुत्रा
 दिपुत्रमहदिवोविहोदिहवकादिपुत्रमिदिहिविहकापुत्रा
 ३) विभा॥हउवदयभर्त्ताविमुदलाकुलादिताडुवयवहमा॥मलकाभुयमालानंमलायवदमादिहउवभलनमावकाविहमाकाकाकुपुत्रा
 ३) विभा॥हउवदयभर्त्ताविमुदलाकुलादिताडुवयवहमा॥मलकाभुयमालानंमलायवदमादिहउवभलनमावकाविहमाकाकाकुपुत्रा

[illegible]

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The participles with *-ante*, *-ile* are typical Bengali forms which are plentifully used in Charyā songs as in *pāñcakeḍuālaparāntē* (Caryā 14), *ethuburānte* (Caryā 16), *nāribiārante* (Caryā 20), *nalīnī banapaisante* (Caryā 23), *giribara sandhi paisante* (Caryā 28), *jāsumuṇante* (Caryā 30), *cāhantecāhante* (Caryā 31), *amia āchante* (Caryā 39), *muṛhā āchante* (Caryā 42), *lārāāchantē* (Caryā 42), *bālijāgante* (Caryā 50), *rātibhaile* (Caryā 2), *caṛile* (Caryā 5 & 8).

নিম্নলিখিত পদগুলিতে -ante, -ile প্রত্যয় ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে। এগুলি চর্যাপদে প্রচুর পরিমাণে পাওয়া যায়। যেমন: পান্‌কেডুয়ালাপারান্তে (চর্যা ১৪), এথুবুরান্তে (চর্যা ১৬), নারিবিয়ারান্তে (চর্যা ২০), নালীনী বানপাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৩), গিরিবারা সান্ধি পাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৮), জাসুমুণান্তে (চর্যা ৩০), কাহান্তেকাহান্তে (চর্যা ৩১), অমিয়া আচান্তে (চর্যা ৩৯), মুর্হা আচান্তে (চর্যা ৪২), লারাআচান্টে (চর্যা ৪২), বালিজাগান্তে (চর্যা ৫০), রতিবহাইলে (চর্যা ২), চাটিলে (চর্যা ৫ ও ৮)।

(Caryā28[1])

নিম্নলিখিত পদগুলিতে -ante, -ile প্রত্যয় ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে। এগুলি চর্যাপদে প্রচুর পরিমাণে পাওয়া যায়। যেমন: পান্‌কেডুয়ালাপারান্তে (চর্যা ১৪), এথুবুরান্তে (চর্যা ১৬), নারিবিয়ারান্তে (চর্যা ২০), নালীনী বানপাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৩), গিরিবারা সান্ধি পাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৮), জাসুমুণান্তে (চর্যা ৩০), কাহান্তেকাহান্তে (চর্যা ৩১), অমিয়া আচান্তে (চর্যা ৩৯), মুর্হা আচান্তে (চর্যা ৪২), লারাআচান্টে (চর্যা ৪২), বালিজাগান্তে (চর্যা ৫০), রতিবহাইলে (চর্যা ২), চাটিলে (চর্যা ৫ ও ৮)।

(Caryā28[2])

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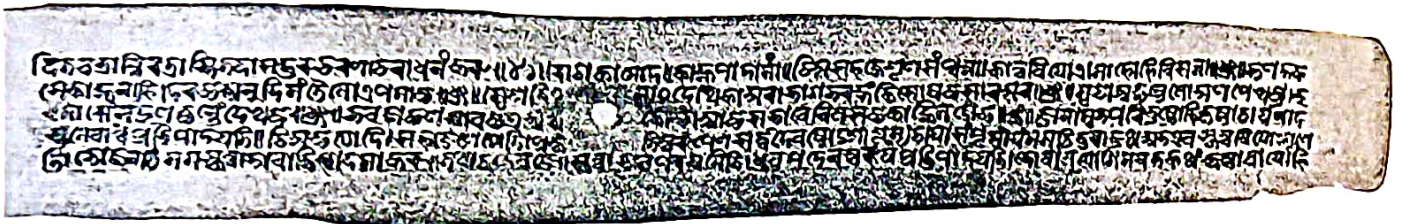
(Caryā30)

নিম্নলিখিত পদগুলিতে -ante, -ile প্রত্যয় ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে। এগুলি চর্যাপদে প্রচুর পরিমাণে পাওয়া যায়। যেমন: পান্‌কেডুয়ালাপারান্তে (চর্যা ১৪), এথুবুরান্তে (চর্যা ১৬), নারিবিয়ারান্তে (চর্যা ২০), নালীনী বানপাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৩), গিরিবারা সান্ধি পাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৮), জাসুমুণান্তে (চর্যা ৩০), কাহান্তেকাহান্তে (চর্যা ৩১), অমিয়া আচান্তে (চর্যা ৩৯), মুর্হা আচান্তে (চর্যা ৪২), লারাআচান্টে (চর্যা ৪২), বালিজাগান্তে (চর্যা ৫০), রতিবহাইলে (চর্যা ২), চাটিলে (চর্যা ৫ ও ৮)।

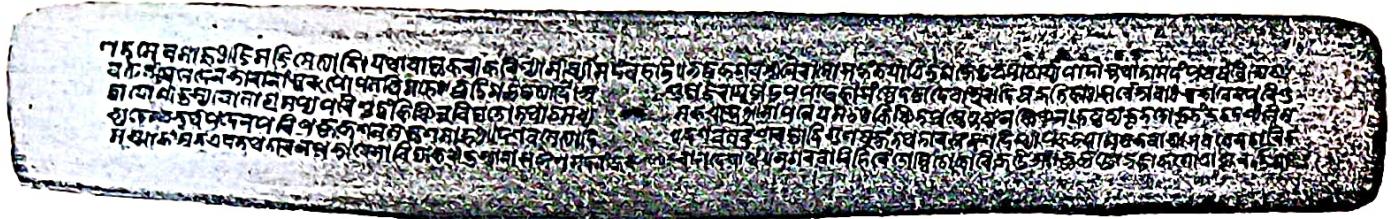
(Caryā31)

নিম্নলিখিত পদগুলিতে -ante, -ile প্রত্যয় ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে। এগুলি চর্যাপদে প্রচুর পরিমাণে পাওয়া যায়। যেমন: পান্‌কেডুয়ালাপারান্তে (চর্যা ১৪), এথুবুরান্তে (চর্যা ১৬), নারিবিয়ারান্তে (চর্যা ২০), নালীনী বানপাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৩), গিরিবারা সান্ধি পাইসান্তে (চর্যা ২৮), জাসুমুণান্তে (চর্যা ৩০), কাহান্তেকাহান্তে (চর্যা ৩১), অমিয়া আচান্তে (চর্যা ৩৯), মুর্হা আচান্তে (চর্যা ৪২), লারাআচান্টে (চর্যা ৪২), বালিজাগান্তে (চর্যা ৫০), রতিবহাইলে (চর্যা ২), চাটিলে (চর্যা ৫ ও ৮)।

(Caryā39[1])

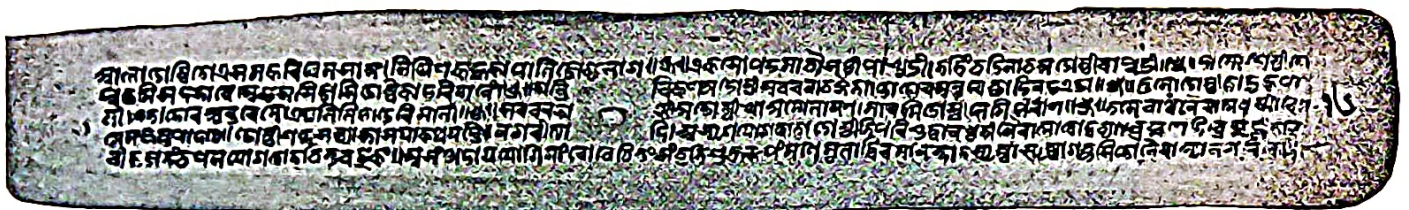


(Caryā 39[2])

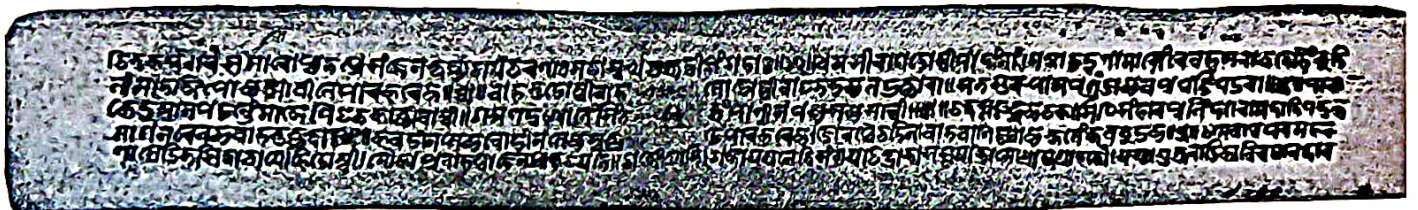


(Caryā 42)

- **Bangla Post-positions** like *mājh* (as the 7th case ending, Caryā 2, 4), *antar* (as the 4th case ending, Caryā 10), *sāṅga* (as 3rd case ending, Caryā 19, 32), *bhiti* (Caryā 1) are still used in Bangla.



(Caryā 10[1])



(Caryā 10[2])

- **The substantive form of verb** use *āch-* and *thāk-* verb roots in Caryā, which is still in use in Bangla.
- The following words used in Caryā are peculiar to Bengali: *bhīṛi* (Caryā 1), *duli*, *rukḥ*, *bahuṛi* (Caryā 2), *tiaṛi*, *ghāṇṭa* (Caryā 4), *sāṅkam* (Caryā 5), *taraṅga* (Caryā 6), *khuntī*, *keruāla* (Caryā 8 & 13), *uāri* (Caryā 12), *kāchī*, *boṛi* (Caryā 14), *guṇiā* (Caryā 17), *kara kasālā* (Caryā 19), *uñcalpāñcal* (Caryā 21), *hārī*, *beṅga* (Caryā 33), *baṇḍa* (Caryā 37),

khāṇṭikeruāla, khāṇṭa, guṇa (Caryā 38), ālā jālā, boba, kāla (Caryā 40), boṛo, kherā (Caryā 41).

Bengali Socio-cultural Scenario as living tradition present in the Caryā songs:

The Caryā manuscript was written in Bengali script by a Bengali scribe. The socio-geographic milieu, as portrayed in many of the Caryā songs, truly bears the signs of socio-geographic culture of Bengal. In one of the Caryās Bhusukupāda (Caryā 49) depicts how pirates in the lower Bengal ransacked the house of a rich man and made him a bankrupt. The few characters present in the Caryā represent the lower strata of the Bengali society—ḍom-ḍomnī, śabara-śabarī, caṇḍālī, śuṇḍinī, vyādha, fishermen belong to the so-called 'untouchable' cross-sections of the society. They usually took to the professions of boatmen, weaving, preparing country liquor, hunting, etc. Kānhapā in one of his Caryās (Caryā 10) describes the profession of Dom community—

Nagara bāhirē ḍombī tohorikuṛiā/choi choi jāi se brāhmaṇanāṛiā (O ḍom woman, thy hut is outside this town; thou goest repeatedly touching the Brahmin and the Buddhist ascetic or the Brahmin lad.)

Similarly, in Caryā 28, the condition of a Śabara girl is depicted thus—ūcā ūcā pābatatahibasaisabarī bālī/moraṅgī pīchaparahiṇasabarī gībataguñjarīmālī (The mountain is very high. The Sabara girl lives there. The Sabara woman is the wearer of the peacock tail; on her neck there is the necklace of the red berry.)

The attire and the customs of the Kāpālīka yogīs described in another Caryā (Caryā 11)—nāṛiśaktidiṛhadhariā khāṭe/anahā ḍamarubājaibīranāde//kāpālījoipaiṭhapacāre/dehanaarī biharaiekārē//ālikālighaṇṭā neuracarāṇe/rabi śaśikuṇḍalakiuābharāṇe//rāgadeśamohalaiā chāra/paramamokhalabhaimuktiḥāra//mārisāsunanandaghareśālī/māmārikāṇhabhaiakabālī. (The power of the artery held the cot tightly. The tabor of the mystic sound (anāhata) rings in heroic noise. Kāṇha, the Kāpālī yogin, entered into preaching. He wanders in the city of the body observing only one rule (for all castes). The vowels and the consonants are the bells and the anklets in the feet. The Sun and the Moon were made ear-rings as ornaments. Taking the ashes of lust, hatred and illusion (in his body) he obtains the pearl necklace (or supreme salvation).)

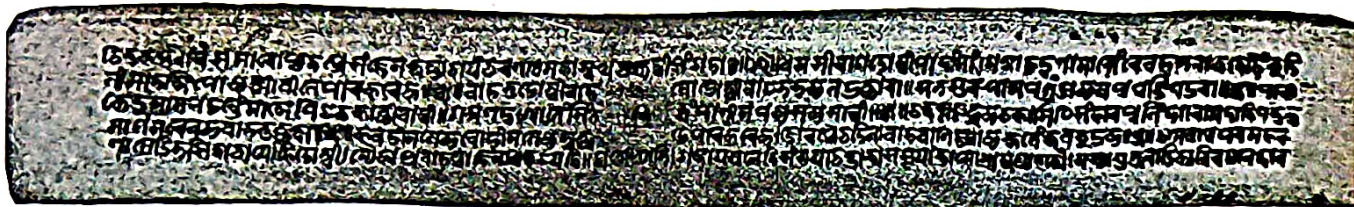
Some of the Caryā songs also reveal that in those days in Bengal the groom's party also received a dowry, and there was no great objection to accepting a girl from a low family in desire for dowry.

The Riverine Bengal:

In some of the Caryā songs (Caryās 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 38, 49), the picture of the riverine Bengal is represented with austerity. In these Caryā songs mention of boat,

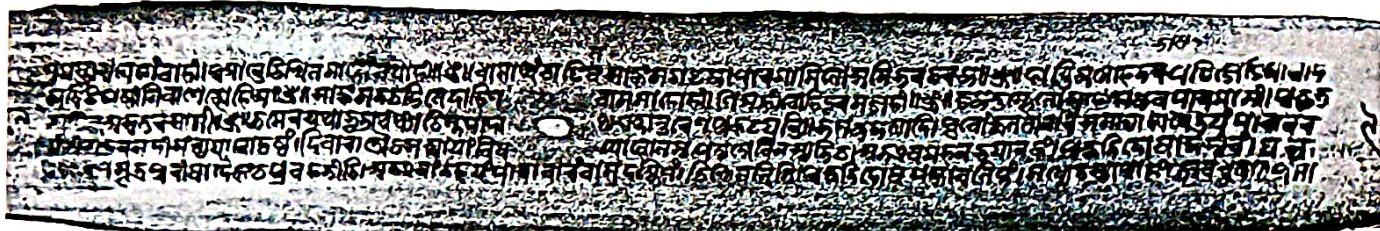
canal, boatman, etc. bears testimony to the riverine Bengal. In Caryā 14 the very mention of Gaṅgā-Yamunā and the superiority of boat compared to any land carriages are proofs of very Bengali nature of Caryā songs.

gaṅgā jaunā mājhē re bahaināi/tahī carīlī mātaṅgipoiā lilepāra parei (Oh! the boat ferries between the Ganges and the Jamuna. Ascending on its board the Caṇḍāla woman



takes the drowned easily to the opposite shore.) (Caryā 14)

On land the ordinary people went about on foot, but on water, of course, they used rafts and boats. Words such as *bhelā* (raft) and *ḍiṅgā*, *ḍiṅgī* or *ḍoṅgā* (small boat, canoe) are derived from the Austric language, and so it would seem that from the very earliest times the Bengalis had quite a close association with water craft. Mention of boats, ports, ferry stations, river commerce, masts and so on has been spoken of earlier in connection with trade, but an understanding of the intimate connection between boats and Bengali life can be gained from the Caryāgīti, where 'boat', 'rudder', 'two-rope', 'oarsman', 'mast', 'water-bailer', 'sail' and the like are used so easily as metaphors as to suggest that boats were very much a part of the lives of the Bengali people. There are also intimations of ferry-boat crossings, the fare for which was paid in cowries or *boti* coins, and often the ferrying was done by low-class women. In Bengal, with its vast network of rivers and streams, it should not be at all surprising that ideas and metaphors relating to the spiritual life should focus on boats and waterways. We read in the Caryāgīti—*bhabaṇāi gahana gambhīra beḡe bāhī/duānte cikhila mājhe na thāhī* (Flowing fast is the deep and sombre stream of the river of life; both the banks are muddy, and the middle of the



stream is unfathomable.) (Caryā 5)

This picture is patently one drawn from the rivers of Bengal—the two banks piled with muddy silt and the deep, sombre stream of the river is, indeed, the Gaṅgā, Padmā, Meghnā or Lauhitya. In a song of Sarahapāda, we read—"To the left of the road, and to the right, are canals and channels. Saraha advises to take the straight road—"Do not go into the maze of waterways, but go straight". This clearly is another picture of Bengal.

With such a plethora of waterways there was a need for bridges in getting from one locality to another and so, from very ancient times, the Bengalis were familiar with bamboo or timber bridges. In one song in the Caryāgītī, we learn that Cāṭilapāda made the pāragāmi people a bridge so that they could cross the river without fear. Having split a large tree with an axe, the planks were fastened and the bridge was made strong. *Bhavaṇaigahaṇagambhīrabegē vāhī/duāntecikhilamājhenathāhī/dhāmārthecāṭilasāṅkamagaṛhai/pāragāmi loa nibharatarai/phāriamoha-tarupāṭijorīa/ādaadiṛhiṭāṅginirvāṇekoṛīa/sāṅkamatacaṛiledāhiṇa bāma mā hohī/niyaḍḍivohidūra mā jāhī/jai tumhe loa he hoibapāragāmī/pucchaucāṭilaanuttarasamī* [River of existence, deep and impenetrable, flows swiftly:/In the two fringes there is mud, no fathom in the middle/For Dhāma Cāṭila builds a bridge:/ People going over to the other side trustfully cross over/The Tree of Stupidity sawn, planks joined together:/The stout Axe of Non-duality is piled for Extinction./ Getting up to the bridge turn not right or left:/ Enlightenment is near, stray not afar./If you, O people, will be going cross-stream,/Cāṭila the matchless Master be (then) queried.]

The bullock dray was the most popular form of road transport from

village to distant village or town. We find no mention of the buffalo wagon although—given the authenticity of the Naiṣadhacarita—the ancient Bengalis were accustomed to the curdled milk of the buffalo. In the accounts of the Greek historians, we note that the kings of Prācyā and Gaṅgārāṣṭra army was its force of elephants, and in numerous inscriptions there is much mention of such forces. In east India, from very ancient times, the elephant was regarded as an important vehicle, and in Bengal, particularly, a special science for the capture and care of elephants was developed. Haraprasad Sastri in his magnum opus HājāraBachareraPurāṇaBānlā Bhaṣāy Racita BauddhaGān of Dohā said that elephant medicine was one of the great achievements of Bengal. Many of the songs



in the Caryāgītī and Dohākoṣa contain elephant metaphors which reveal a close connection between this beast and the lives of the Bengali people. As today in setting up a kheda for the capture of an

Right: Elephant shown on a plaque from Chandraketurgh

Image source: Haque (2001)

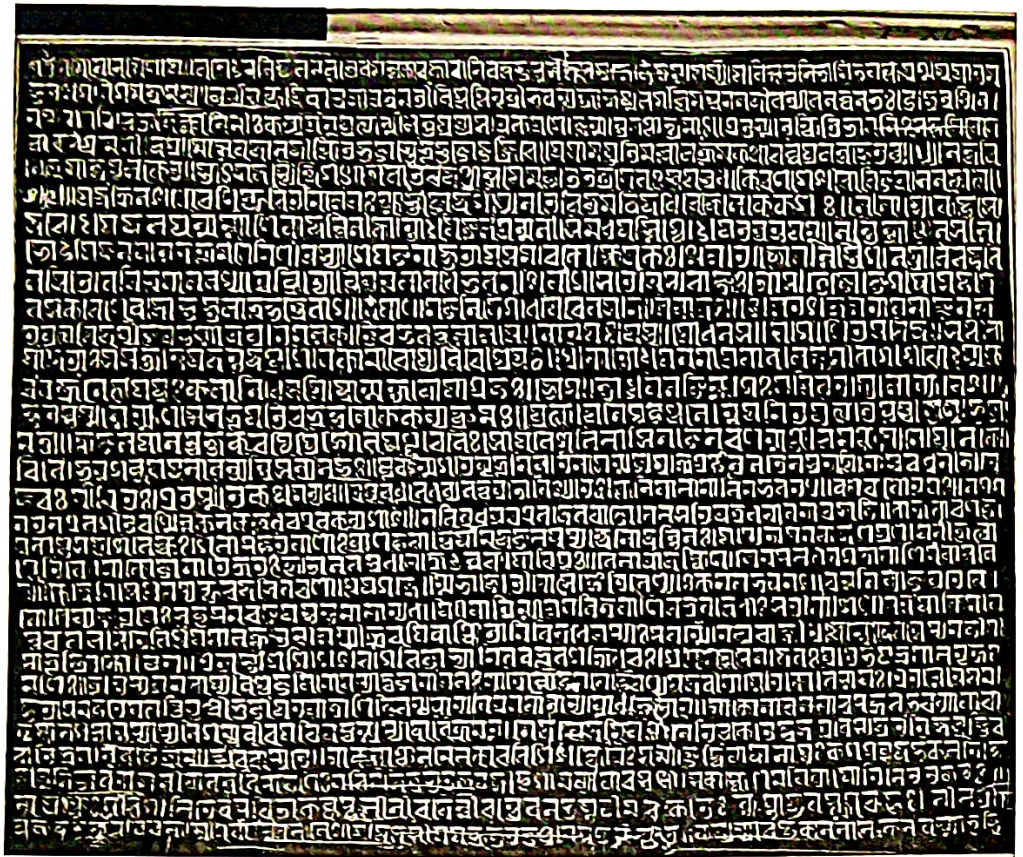
elephant it is necessary to take the elephant and its young as well, we learn that that was the case in ancient Bengal too. Elephants reamed freely along the banks of the mountain streams of northern and eastern Bengal, and in one of the songs of the Vīṇāpāda it is said that the elephants mind charmed before its capture by the singing of the boatmen's songs.

The shape of the bullock dray is still the same as it was in ancient times; evidence of that is to be seen in the ancient stone and terracotta plaques of Bengal and elsewhere in India. Bullock drays were also used by the bridegrooms' parties, as is suggested in one of the songs of the Caryā. On one of the Pāhārpur terracottas there is a depiction of a richly adorned horse, and mounted on horses dressed in this way rich people would go about, accompanied by music.

Apparently, palanquins were used too. In the Idilpur inscriptions of Keśavasena there is indirect mention of a palanquin manufactured in ivory, with a carrying pole, and it is said that Vallālasena carried away the queens of his enemies in such a palanquin as this.

The Musical Heritage of the Caryā

In the contemporary art and literature there is very clear evidence of singing and dancing in the secular life as well



as in various activities intended for the celebration of social and religious festivities. In a song of Kānhapada in the Caryāgīti there is a beautiful, though brief, description of wedding party in the context of which several musical instruments are mentioned. Several representations of men and women in the dancing posture, and musicians playing upon cymbals, gong, lyre, even earthen pots, and holding drum and lute, adorn the temple of Paharpur (now in Bangladesh), which flourished between the 7th and the 12th Century AD. Dance and music formed a vital part of the social and cultural life of ancient Bengal. This is evident from the terracotta figurines and plaques recovered from different old sites like Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhibi (Bardhaman district, dated c. 2000 BC), Tāmralipta (Medinipur district), Chandraketurgarh

Top: Idilpur inscriptions of Keśavasena



Top : Wall of Paharpur Temple Image source: Haque (2014)

Below : Terracota plaque of Dancing men (North 24-Parganas district, 3rd century BCE), Pāhārpur and Maināmati (both in Image source: Haque (2014)



Bangladesh now, between c. 7th and 8th century AD). Pāṇḍu Rājār Ḍhibi in Bardhaman has yielded a male torso in dancing pose. The inherent force of the figurine reminds one of the inspired rhythms of the Harappan dancer. The terracotta figurine of a dancing girl of 9" height, a mutilated plaque exhibiting a stringed vīṇā, a figurine seated on a pedestal and playing on a harp and a fragmentary terracotta plaque depicting a dancing courtesan or surasundarī with accompaniment of music found in Tamralipta

demonstrate the extant rich musical heritage in Bengal since prehistoric times. These evidences undoubtedly prove the existence of a continuous tangible heritage of music right from 2000 BC in Bengal which gets reflected in the songs of Caryā.

(ii) **The Middle Bangla Period** from 1200 to 1800 AD is divided into three stages:

(a) **Transitional Middle Bangla (1200-1300 A.D.)**—The Bengali characteristics of the language had fully been established. From the speech of the Caryās it was transformed into that of the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana*.

The notable linguistic characteristics of this period are the following—

- i. The post positions in the declension were fully established
- ii. The conjugation became active in the past and future forms of the transitive verb
- iii. The system of pronominal

affixation to the past and future bases came in, though it was not fully established till the 15th century and later.

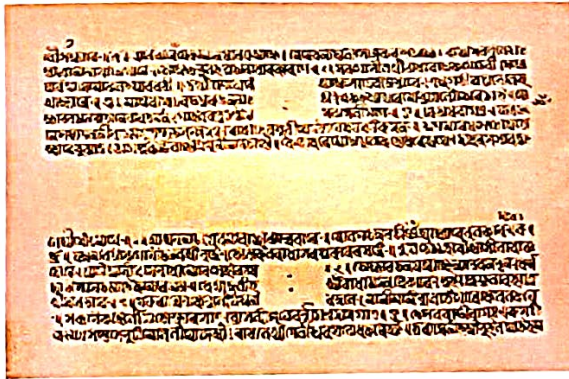
iv. The old *mātrā-vṛtta* metre of 16 or 15 *moræ* found in the *Caryās*, became, by an arrangement of *akṣaras*, a syllabic metre of $8 + 6 = 14$ *akṣaras* or syllables during this period. Tendencies towards the development of this special metre of Bengali, the *Payār* metre, are noticeable in the Old Bengali period and were possibly present in Common Eastern Magadhan (*Apabhraṃśa Māgadhī* of the East).

The national legends of Bengal, the stories of *Gōpīcanda*, of *Behulā* and *Lakhindar*, of *Khullanā* and *Dhanapati*, of *Phullara* and *Kālaketu*, and of *Lāusēna* which were treated in great poems in the following centuries, were taking shape during this century. Politically it was an age of chaos and destruction, being the first century of the *Turkī* conquest. There were some literary activity—*Kāṇā Haridatta*, *Mayūra Bhaṭṭa* and *Māṇik Datta* took up the *Behulā* legend, the *Lāusēna* romance and the *Caṇḍī* legends and treat them in long narrative poems to be chanted before a gathering of people at a number of sittings, seem to have flourished before 1300. The fragments that we have from these poets are in ordinary late Middle Bengali manuscripts. The forms and contents of the Middle Bengali narrative and lyrical poetry presuppose uninterrupted cultivation for centuries. Being almost exclusively religious poems, they were sung and chanted as part of rituals and were extempore. A permanent form was given only when the rituals had been accepted widely and had insinuated themselves into the higher society and accepted by the Brahmins. In some cases, the early

compositions, tentative and inadequate were subsequently absorbed in or eclipsed by the outstanding achievement of a later and better writer. Indigenous myths and legends inherited directly from Old and Middle Indo-Aryan and gathered from the various ethnic and cultural groups began to blend and crystallize round popular deities and semi-mythical figures. A new myth of cosmogony was evolved, which is different from the Sanskrit tradition but which has an unmistakable affinity with the cosmogonic hymn of the *R̥gveda* (10.129) and with the Polynesian myth of creation. The Middle Bengali narrative poems on the popular deities like *Manasā*, *Caṇḍī* and *Dharma* invariably begin with a narration of cosmogony associated with the cults. The poems on the whole are the productions of the society. It means that the forms and contents of the poems were determined by the social condition and modified by popular predilections. Whether written under the patronage of a rich man or not, the poems were meant for the masses and enjoyed, not in the seclusion of an exclusive audience hall but by the whole village community assembled to take part in a common worship or festivity of the village deity. It is therefore inevitable that the characters of the story would be broad types and that a good many social customs and observations would be embodied in it.

(b) **Early Middle Bangla (1300-1500 A.D)**—The next great landmark in the study of Bangla, after the *Caryās*, is the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* of *Baru Caṇḍīdāsa*. This work from the point of view of language, is of unique character in Middle Bengali literature. The manuscript of the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* was discovered

Right : Image of the folios of a manuscript of śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana



by Basanta-Ranjan Rāy and was published by Vaṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat in 1916. The grammar of the speech of the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana gives a clue to many of the forms of New Bengali. The Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana belongs to the Early Middle Bengali stage. The poem is remarkable in more than one respect. The language presents an old form of middle Bengali. The structure of the poem is quite unlike the usual narrative type. The tone of the poem is entirely secular, often verging on crudeness and vulgarity. In form and technique Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana differs from all other narrative poems on the story of Krishna. The story is carried entirely through dialogue and trialogue of songs, and the songs are almost always strung by a single or a double verse in Sanskrit, somewhat in the manner of Jaideva's Gītagovinda. Such a narrative or dramatic poem comprising entirely of talks between two or three persons were known as Vāgveṇī (speech pleating) or vāk-kelī (speech play) in high (i.e. Sanskrit and Prakṛit) literature and as Jhumur in low (i.e. vernacular) literature. Some of these connecting verses in Sanskrit are rather good, and it can be surmised that the poet (if the verses came from him) possessed some skill in Sanskrit versification. In this period, we can see the working of the influence of classical Sanskrit on Bangla.

The Rāmāyaṇa and the BhāgavataPurāṇa and the Mahābhārataare adapted into thelanguage, hence the language changes its spirit under the umbrage of Sanskrit. There is a great access of tatsamas making many old tadbhavas obsolete or restricted in use. The literary language based on West Bengali, is perfected, and is employed in all parts of Bengal, slightly modified by the local dialects. Apart from Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana, Caṇḍidāsa composed his songs, Kṛttivāsa translated the Rāmāyaṇa into Bengali in the middle of the 15th century, Vijaya Gupta (author of Manasāmaṅgal), MālādharaVasu(who was conferred the sobriquet of GuṇarājaKhāna by the sultan RuknuddīnBārbakShāh for his literary work Śrīkṛṣṇavijaya 'Triumph of Lord Kṛṣṇa),ParameśvarDās (author of ParāgaliMahābhārata) and ŚrīkaraNandī(translated JaiminīyaSaṁhitā into Bangla) flourished.

The notable linguistic features of this period are the following—

- i. Weakening of independent /i(u)/ after /a/ and /ā/, resulting in new diphthongs /ai/, /āi/, /au/, /āu/, which were regarded as one syllable in which the second element was pronounced very short and the first element tended to be modified.
- ii. This was followed by epenthesis of /-i/, /-u/, e.g., /-enta/ < /-anta/ of the present participle is found as /-ita/. The change of /-ent-/ > /-ēt-/ > /-īt-/ having been carried out during the preceding period.
- iii. The aspiration of nasal in the groups /m/+h/ (p), /n/+h/(y=bn) is lost by the middle of the 15th century.
- iv. Final /-a/ seems to have become quiescent by the middle of the

15th century.

v. The conjugation of the verb is purely active in the past tense.

vi. There are still a few traces of the old inflected passive.

vii. Compound tenses come into being.

viii. The use of a strong form of the genitive /-ra/ for the plural, noticed in its incipient stage in the Śrīkṣṇakīrtana (where it is found with the personal pronouns only) becomes established by 1500.

ix. The plural affix of the verb /-anti/ is found as /-anta/, /-enta/ in the 15th century. Finally, by the 17th century it yields to the form /-en/, which is influenced by the old plural affix for the noun oblique.

(c) **Late Middle Bangla** (1500-1800 A.D.). The earlier part of this period, during the 16th century, witnessed the development of Vaiṣṇava literature through the influence of Śrī Caitanya (1485-1533) and his disciples. Biography as a genre was added to Bengali literature. There was very great influence of Sanskrit, and of Maithilī and a restricted one of Western Hindi (Braj-bhākhā) on both language and literature. The artificial literary dialect Braja-bulī grows up. The Bengal Vaiṣṇavism drew for its inspiration on the text of the Bhāgavata which was probably of South Indian (Karnāṭaka) origin. It seems to have been brought to Bengal by Karnāṭa immigrants long settled in Mithilā, some of whom held high office at the court of Husain Shāh. Two of Hussain Shāh's most trusted officers were the brothers Sanātana and Rūpa whose ancestors had belonged to Karnāṭa. Before the brothers met Chaitanya, they had been imbibing Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavism. By the end of the fifteenth century, the study of the

Bhāgavata by devotional Vaishnavas had come to Śāntipur and Navadvīp (now in Nadia district of West Bengal), which had become the best centres of Brahmanism and Sanskrit learning. Only ambitious scholars with court connections would go to Gauḍ and risk the contamination of the court atmosphere and the odium of foreign contact.

The notable linguistic features of this period are the following—

i. Epenthetic /u/ became /i/ during the earlier part of this period, and came to modify the preceding and following /a/ and /ā/ sounds and ultimately were dropped entirely in West Bengali dialects by the close of the 18th century.

ii. Affixes like /-iā/, verbal or nominal, were contracted and were gradually turned to the monophthong /ε/, /e/, written -yā, -e in many dialects. E.g., rākhiyā (i n L q) > rāikhyā (i BL ṛ) > rāikhiyā (i B L q) > rekhyā (ṭ i L ṛ) > rekhye (ṭ i Ṭ L) > rekhe (ṭ i Ṭ L).

iii. In West Central Bengal, along the Hooghly River, the habit of vowel-mutation and general contraction of syllables begins, and this invades the other dialects as well.

iv. The aspiration of ṛh is continued till the beginning of the 17th century and then is gradually lost, e.g., Middle Bangla words paṛhe (<Sanskṛitpaṛhati "reads") and paṛe (<Sanskṛitpatati "falls") becoming identical paṛe in Modern Bangla.

v. There is a great influence of Persian on the vocabulary, especially in the 18th century, and to a slight extent, of Portuguese.

vi. The loss of the final /-a/ gives an impetus to a system of metre based on stress—tendencies towards which are not absent in the 14th century, but the

syllabic metre is perfected and holds the field in all formal poetry, the stressed metre being confined to popular poetry, songs, lullabys, charms, etc., and its presence and importance are recognised by learned people only by the end of the 19th century.

(iii) Finally, after 1800 AD, we find the Modern or New Bangla, marked by the introduction of written prose in the books of Fort William College (established in 1800) The colloquial variety of Bangla based on the speech variety of Calcutta (called 'Kolkata' now) made its first appearance through the *Hutōm Pēcāra Nakśā* (1862) by Kālīprasanna Simha. The writings of literary as well as cultural stalwarts like Rājā Rāmmohan Roy, Ísvarcandra Vidyāsāgar, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitra, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore and the publication of a number of literary journals and periodicals helped to shape the written language to the greatest extent. The influence of English in the vocabulary, idioms, and expressions as well as in the writing styles of Bangla is significant by this time. The first ever printed book with a few Bengali characters was published from Lisbon, Portugal in 1743, but the book was published mainly in Roman characters. The first Bengali script was used in print in 1778 in the *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed. The fonts and types for Bangla developed during this time also spread to all parts of Bangla speech community. The same fonts with some extensions were also used for the neighbouring languages deploying this writing system.

Bangla prose had developed two

literary styles during the 19th-20th Century: The *Sādhubhāṣā* (সাধুভাষা—"Elegant Language or Style") and the *Calitabhāṣā* (পরিভাষা—"Current Language, or Modern Style"). It is the latter style that is prevalent today in written prose.

The Language Movement in Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) began in 1948, as civil society dissented to the elimination of the Bangla script from currency and stamps, which were in use since the British Raj. The movement reached its pinnacle in 1952, when on 21 February the police fired on demonstrating students and civilians, triggering numerous injuries and deaths. Later, following the Language movement, on 27 April 1952, the All-Party National Language Committee decided to demand

Right : Bhāṣā
śahīda smāraka



establishment of an organization for the promotion of Bengali language. Bangla Academy, Dhaka right from its inception in 1955 has been engaged in promoting and fostering Bangla as the lingua franca of the country before and after independence from Pakistan in 1971. Through the various commissions and committees constituted by the Government of Bangladesh (Bāṅlādeśa Jātiyā Śikṣā Kāmiśana in 1972, Jātiyā Śikṣā Upadeśtā Pariṣad in 1979, Bāṅlā Bhāṣā Bāstabāyana Sela in 1982, Bāṅlā Bhāṣā Kāmiṭi in 1983, etc.) after independence in 1971 Bangla was made the primary medium of instruction/communication in all Governmental and educational activities. Through a great struggle and bloodshed, the Bengalis established Bangla as an official language of the state.

Written Bangla

The 'Bangla alphabet' (𑂔𑂧𑂱𑂰 𑂔𑂧𑂱𑂰-
Bāṅlālīpi, ISO 15924) is derived from



the Brāhmī writing system, which is related to the Nāgarī (also known as Devanāgarī) script as well as to Trihutā writing system.

Considered to

be fifth most widely used writing system in the world, this combined Bangla-Asamiyā-Manipuri Script (showing some variations for Asamiyā and Meitei or Biṣṇupriyā Manipuri), was used in the eastern Indian Sanskrit manuscripts too. For Chākmā in India and Bangladesh

and for Kokborok in Tripurā, it was and still is one of the scripts used. A close variant, called Tirhutā (now available also in UNICODE 10.0 as 11480 114DF) or Mithilākṣara was used for Maithili from the 14th Century until the early-20th century. In this context, one finds a mention of 'Sylheti Nāgarī lipi' or 'Siloṭi' (added to the Unicode Standard in March 2005 with the release of version 4.1) the details of which could be of interest only to historians and historical linguists. But Sylheti Bangla is generally written by many in the modern-day Bangla script now for all practical purposes. Originally, during the reign of the Pāla dynasty (750-1154 AD) in the eastern India, and even earlier, perhaps during the Malla period (694 AD onwards), the present-day Bangla writing system got a shape comparable to the modern-day ones. A pictorial description of Brāhmī to Modern Bangla Script could be presented here in a tabular form:

300 BCE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
200 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
400 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
600 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
800 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
900 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
1100 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘
1300 CE	𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗	𑀘

Left : Image of the folios of a manuscript written on Trihutā

Modern	𑂔	𑂧	𑂱	𑂰	𑂔	𑂧
	k	j	m	r	s	a

Table 1: Pictorial depiction of Evolution of Brāhmī to Bangla

The inscriptional evidence in Brāhmī is found in the Archaic Brāhmī from the 3rd century B.C. to the 1st century B.C, and in Middle Brāhmī – soon after (1st-3rd Century A.D.) and then on in the Late Brāhmī (4th-6th Century A.D.). This evidence could be seen in both Bangladesh and West Bengal by (1) The Mahāsthānagara (Bogra district, Bangladesh—the ancient name being Puṇḍranagara or Pauṇḍravardhanapura) inscriptions, (2) Brāhmī (and Kharoṣṭhī) inscriptions from the lower ‘Gangetic Bengal’ and (3) Copper plate inscriptions of the Imperial Guptas from Northern part of West Bengal and North-West Bangladesh—in the areas under Dharmāditya, Gopachandra and Samācāradeva (about whom one only knows from five Copper-plates found in Kotālipārā in the Faridpur district in Bangladesh, one in Mallasārul in the Burdwan district (West Bengal), and one in Jayrāmapura (Balleśvara district, now in Odisha). These epigraphs from the eastern part of Undivided India (dating back to the 4th-6th Centuries A.D.) showed some characteristic features of letters (especially in g‘ma’, j ‘la’, k‘śa’, m‘sa’ and n‘ha’), which led to the development of eastern variety of Gupta script. Epigraphic records from Bangladesh demonstrate remarkable developments in Eastern Brāhmī. In this context, the Tippera copper plate inscription of the ‘Samatāṭa’ rulers such as Lokanātha (dated 7th Century A.D., during the latter half), the Kailan inscription of Śrīdharaṇarāta as well as the Asrafpur copper plates. The letters seem to hang down from wedge shaped solid triangles with right hand verticals bending down at the bottom, because of which

it was described by Prinsep and Fleet as *Kuṭīlalipi* (literally, ‘Cursive writing style’), whereas the term *Siddhamātrikā* (as a mātrā or bar is placed over each of the letters) was used by Al Biruni (973-1048) to designate the script of Northern India. The next stage of development is illustrated by the 9th Century copper plate inscriptions from Khalimpur of the reign of Dharmapāla, from Monghyr and Nālandā of the time of Devapāla in Bihar, and from Jagajjīvanpura (Malda) of the reign of Mahendrapāla. The Siddhamātrikā (mentioned as ‘Siddham’ in Chinese sources) is said to have been prevalent also in this region up to the end of the tenth century. Also called the Gauri (i.e., Gandi) in Pūrvadeśā or the Eastern country, it was regarded as the same script to which is given the appellative Proto-Bangla characteristics in rudimentary forms, in the period between A.D. 875 and A.D. 1025.

In some epigraphs it is considered as belonging to the second quarter of the eleventh century A.D. Flattening of head-marks becomes prominent in comparison to the wedge-shaped serifs. An important landmark in the development of the Bangla script is the Rāmagañja copper plate inscription of Mahāmāṇḍalika in the last quarter of the eleventh century A.D. It is the earliest document from this entire region which bears the letter m, with a tick rising upwards. The full vowel i develops a tick at the right end of the upper horizontal bar above and a curved hook below. Initial e approaches the modern Bangla character. A mature form of Proto-Bangla, the immediate precursor of Bangla script, is illustrated in the inscriptions of the Varman, Sena and Deva rulers of the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries.

The evolution of the Bangla script is aligned with the story of advancement of printing technology. The first “Movable type” scripts technically created and used while printing

Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's (1751-1830)

1778-book titled, 'A Grammar of the Bengal

Language'. In 1785, Governor-General

Warren Hastings (1732-1818) requested

another civilian, Charles Wilkins (1749-

1836) to cut punches for Bangla printing

characters. The current printed form of

Bangla script appeared soon after. It is

generally agreed that Wilkins developed

Bangla print script [111]. He passed on this

knowledge to Pañcānana Karmakāra (?-

1804), a renowned artist in Bengal. Later it

was Karmakar and his family that became

famous in Bangla printing technology.

Shepherd was another assistant of Wilkins in

this designing of script, which became more

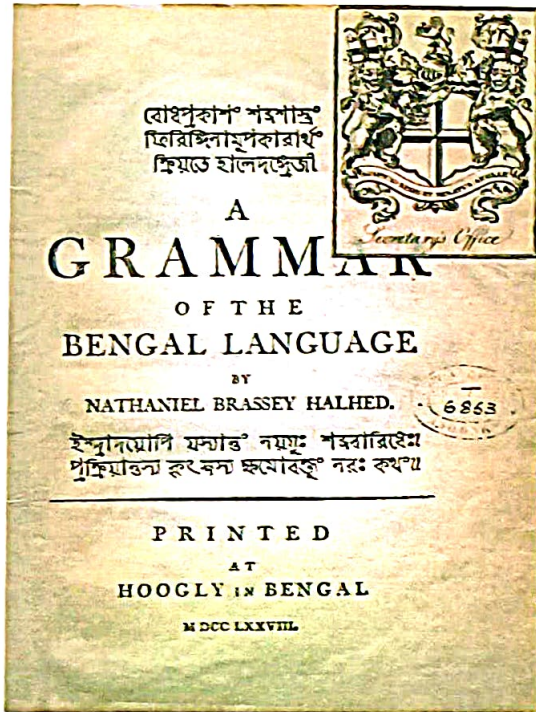
angular with sharper turns and edges [133].

A few archaic letters were modernized

during the 19th century. It was standardized

by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar when

Left : Title page of
A Grammar of the
Bengal Language



the Bangla type fonts were to be used to publish on a large scale under the Calcutta School Book Society.

Much later, in 1935, the Linotype technique, invented by Ottmar Mergenthaler (1854-1899) in 1886, was introduced into Bangla printing in 1935, by the efforts of Suresh Chandra Majumdar (1888-1954), Rajsekhar Basu (1880-1960), Jatindra Kumar Sen (1882-1966) and his disciple, Sushil Kumar Bhattacharya and had begun being used by the Ānandabāzara Patrikā group, later followed by others. Within a few years the more advanced monotype technology came to be used in Bangla printing. However, in Bangla printing culture, monotype has a very limited acceptance and linotype held stage till, eventually, the digital technology came in to replace all earlier techniques.

All these could be presented in a table:

PERIOD	DESCRIPTION	NAMES
2nd-3rd Century B.C.	Use of Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts begin in the subcontinent. Brāhmī was widely used during the Mauryan King, Aśoka. In one theory, Brāhmī is based on North Semitic alphabet but suitably modified to fit the need of local languages. It is currently believed to have been an independent development.	Brāhmī

PERIOD	DESCRIPTION	NAMES
1st-3rd Century AD	The Kuṣāṇa script, named after the Kuṣāṇa royal dynasty.	Kuṣāṇa script
4th-5th Century AD	The next stage of its evolution was into the Gupta script, named after the Gupta royal dynasty.	Gupta script
7th Century AD	Epigraphic records from Bangladesh demonstrate remarkable developments in Eastern Brāhmī, giving rise to the Kuṭīla-lipi	Kuṭīla-lipi
8th Century AD	Some copper plate inscriptions are found in the Khalimpur, Bangladesh during the reign of Dharmapāla, from Monghyr and Nālandā in Bihar, of the time of Devapāla, and from Jagjīvanapura in West Bengal of the reign of Mahendrapāla.	Siddhamātrkā
9th Century AD until 1025 AD	Proto-Bangla characteristics in rudimentary forms develop. An important landmark in the development of the Bangla script is the Rāmagañja copper plate inscription of Mahāmāṇḍalika found in the last quarter of the eleventh century A.D.	Proto-Bangla Script & Language
12th-13th Century AD	A mature form of Proto-Bangla, the immediate precursor of Bangla script, is found in the inscriptions of the Varmaṇa, Sena and Deva rulers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.	Matured Proto-Bangla
14th-15th Century AD	The characteristics of typical Bangla script began to develop, as could be seen in the copper plate inscription of Vijayamāṇikya-I of Tripura dated 1478 AD - also illustrates forms of Bangla letters in the fifteenth century A.D.	Modern Bangla Script era begins (See Ross 1999)

3.2. Languages Considered

Below is the tabular representation of the languages using Bangla script that is placed on EGIDS Scale 1-6. (See 117 for details.) Some languages under EGIDS 5 and 6 have also developed their own scripts for printing and publishing. Some had used Bangla script earlier (such as Bodo), or used it in West Bengal at some point of time (Santali) but have later shifted to another writing system. Bodo is now written in Nāgarī or Devanāgarī and for Santali one uses both Nāgarī/Devanāgarī and Ol-chiki. For the purposes of the Bangla LGR, only languages belonging to the EGIDS scale 1 to 4 have been considered. Consider the following table:

EGIDS Scale 1	EGIDS Scale 2	EGIDS Scale 3	EGIDS Scale 4	EGIDS Scale 5	EGIDS Scale 6
Bangla (Bengali)				Santali, Bodo, Riang, Khumi, Mru(ng), Asho	Lepcha Pnar, Koda/ Kora, Chak
	Asamiyā (Assamese)			Koch or Rājabañśī	Mālto or Mālpāhāriyā
	Maṇipuri or Meitei		Biṣṇupriyā Maṇipuri, Kok- Borok (Tripura & Bangladesh)	Chākmā, Hājong, Muṇḍāri & Kurux (of Bangladesh)	Toto, Rohingyā, Tippera, Megam, Tanchangya
			Usoi	Limbu, Sadri or Oraon	Bhumij or Muṇḍāri, Bawm, Chin

Table 4: Main languages in India and Bangladesh that use Bangla Script on the EGIDS Scale

Conclusion

By and large it is evident from the arguments made and evidences cited above that Bangla language and its community has a continuous history over 2600 years starting at least from the 3rd century BC. The existence of Bangla as a linguistic continuum is thus proved to be of ancient antiquity. There are remnants of Bengal heritage even before the 3rd century BC. Thus, a theory of pre-Aryan or indigenous origin of the Bengali people comes into play. There is, of course, the presence of the Kol and Dravidian people in the Western fringes of the Bengali area and of Boḍo and Mon-Khmer people in the northern and eastern frontiers. The Ganges with its branch and the Brahmaputra divided the country into four tracts, in which dwelt, several hundred years before the Christ, at a time when the riverine system of the country must have been a great deal different from the present one, the people of Puṇḍras (in the North Central Bengal), the Vaṅgas (in Bengal east of the Brahmaputra and north of Padmā), and the Rārhas and to their south the Sumhas (west of the Hugli). A great deal of the delta was marshly and uninhabitable in the early period of Bengal history. The four sub-groups, viz. Puṇḍra, Vaṅga, Rārha and Sumha, were the important ones, who gave their names to various tracts they inhabited. As the whole area has been very influential from the maritime past to the

colonial period (Calcutta was the capital of British India till 1911) for its cottage and textile industries, agro-economic activities, the language of the native people was also linguistically sustainable. This is the reason for maintaining the core linguistic features (phonological, morphological and syntactic) through the ages. It also be noted that the language got enriched with semantic components in contact situations. That's why, (apart from the evidence of Caryā) for its long indigenous ancestry the language was seemed to be so important that lexicons of this language had been incorporated in the Chinese-Sanskrit dictionary compiled in China in 8th century CE. In view of all the parameters laid down in support of claiming the Classical status of a language, Bangla fairly and justifiably stands the claim of being ascribed the Classical status.

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ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
श्रीः नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
किं वक्तव्यं नमो भगवते
वासुदेवाय नमो भगवते
वासुदेवाय नमो भगवते

Chapter Nine

Development of the Bengali Script

Rajat Sanyal
Somnath Chakraborty



Development of the Bengali Script

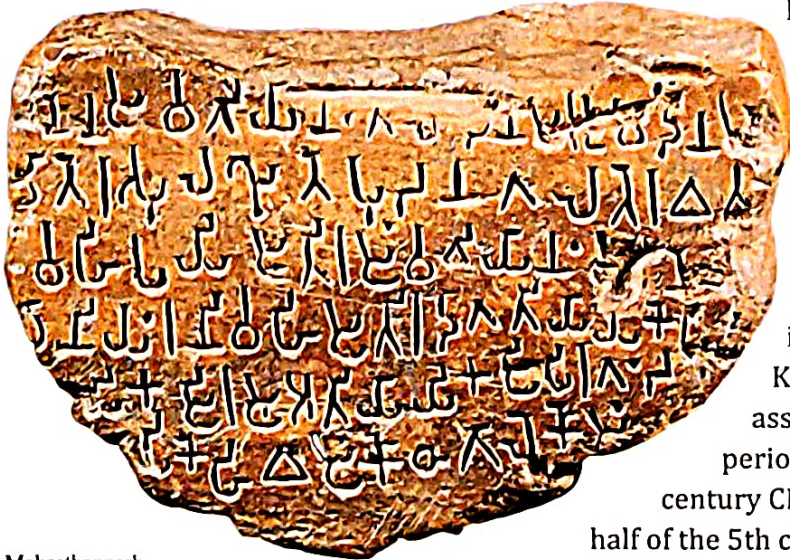
Till date the early Brāhmī characters of 3rd century BCE in which the Mahasthangarh fragmentary stone plaque inscription, found in Bogra district of Bangladesh, is written, contain the earliest

specimen of writing from the region in which the Bengali script is now used. Further, the letters inscribed on numerous earthen pots, sherds and seals discovered from the sites of Chandraketugarh and its contiguous regions in the district of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal prove the prevalence of Kharoṣṭī and that of a mixed script (consisting of letters

in Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭī), assigned to a period from 1st century CE to first half of the 5th century

CE palaeographically, in Gangetic

West Bengal. In all probability, the presence of Kharoṣṭī script in these areas is the outcome of its importation by the people or communities, acquainted with north-western Prakrit, who for trading reasons had travelled all the way through hills and plains from the north-west to the lower reaches of the Ganga and eventually settled as a political force in ancient Vaṅga.



Above: Mahasthangarh plaque





Inscribed Seals from Chandraketurah



Inscribed Potteries from Chandraketurah



Below: Allahabad Pillar and Inscription of Samudragupta



Image Source:

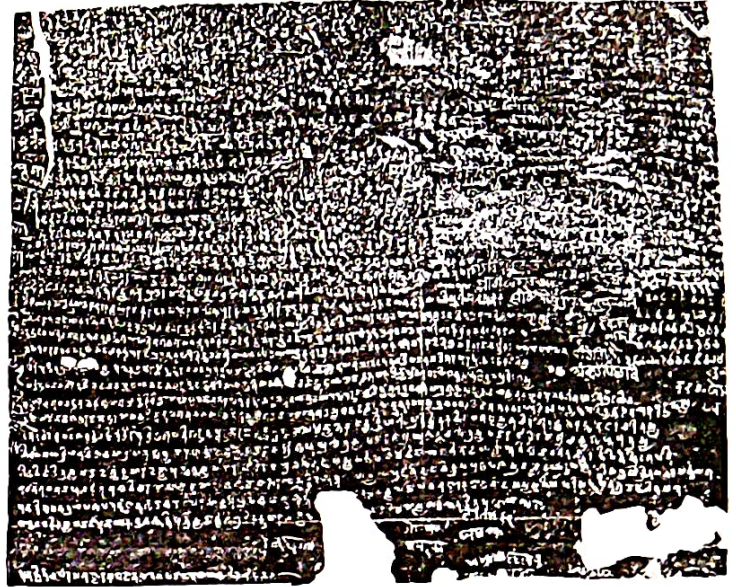
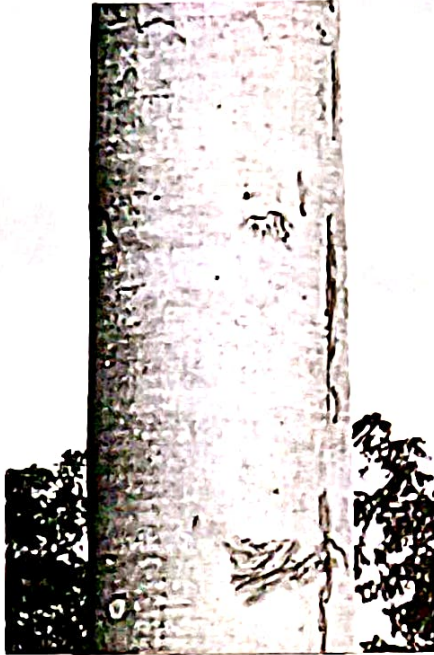
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/de/Samudragupta_inscription_on_the_Allahabad_pillar_of_Ashoka.jpg

Right: Allahabad Pillar and Inscription of Samudragupta

Image Source: Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III, Plate 1, p. 212.

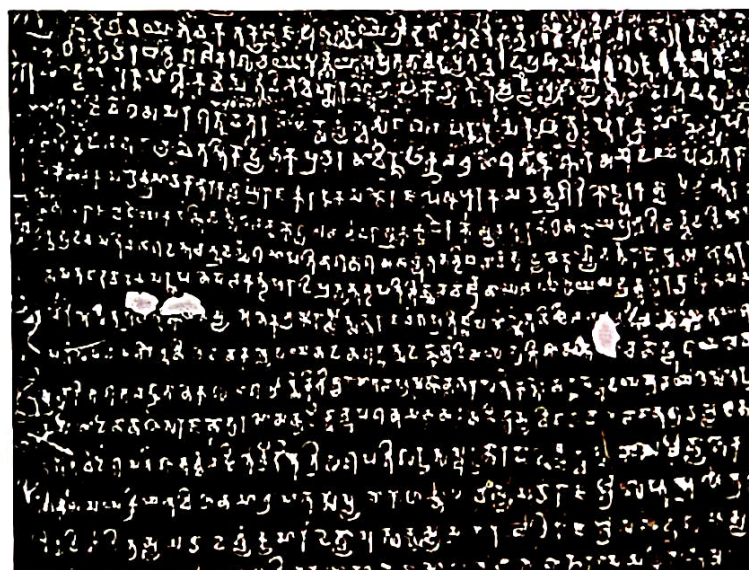
However, for a precise and pertinent study of the development of Bengali script we would solely like to consider the inscriptions, belonging to the 5th century CE, from the northern sector of present-day Bangladesh, as the Arabic and Persian inscriptions, found from the locales

journey of transformation is discerned from the Allahabad Praśasti composed by Harisena. The application of sa of the so-called eastern variety, though, is detectable in earlier epigraphs. Finding spots of the relevant records cannot make us adduce a logic in determining the



within our periphery, are heterogeneous in characters. Palaeographic properties observed in these inscriptions belong to the eastern variety of Late Brāhmī with few of them written in cursive manner to some extent. We may direct our discourse with a focus to observe the evolution and various forms of the letters ma, la, sa, ṣa and ha. The letters in question in earlier forms of their

western boundary of the geographical area, where the eastern variety of the Late Brāhmī belonging to the 4th-5th centuries of Current Era was prevailing. It is so, because often variations of same letters with distinctive features are present



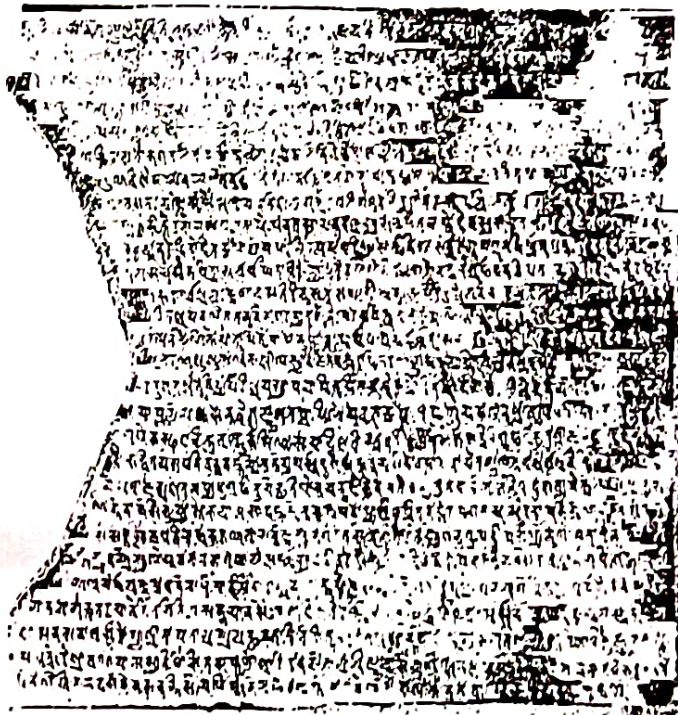
in separate inscriptions, accredited to the same period, that are found from the same site. This kind of instance occurs in other parts of ancient India too, of which the two inscriptions, found from

(Reverse)



Tippera Copper Plate of Lokanātha
Image Source: *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 15.

The Apsad Inscription of the reign of Ādityasena (c. 660-75 CE) might be the best example of this new trend. The letters in this record seem to hang down from nail-headed solid triangles and their right hand verticals incline to bend down at the bottom.



Kailan Inscription of Śrīdhārāraṇa

Image Source: *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol. XXIII

James Prinsep and JF Fleet described the script of this record to be

Kuṭila. We may, in this connection, recall the evidence of Dewal Praśasti of 1049



Above: Ashrafpur Copper Plate of Devakhaḍga

Vikrama Samvat, that makes a mention about certain Takṣāditya, a karaṇa hailing from the Gauḍa country, who possessed expertise in Kuṭila letters. According to the evidence of this eulogy, it was composed by Nehila, drafted by Taksaditya and engraved by Somanātha who belonged to Kanyakubja. Although, scholars are not unanimous in explaining the expression kuṭilākṣarāṇividuṣā, attributed to Takṣāditya, in line 26 of the inscription. However, to designate the script of North India the term Siddhamātṛkā, used by Al Beruni, has been preferred by academicians to that of Kuṭila.

Graphical representations of the looped variety of ka, curved form of ja with the upper limb merged with the head-mark, ta developing a downward tick at the end of the flat top, na with the outer arms growing longer and ra developing a tail at the bottom can be observed in the inscriptions traced from eastern India in general, written in

Siddhamātrkā of the seventh century CE. The graphs of sa with a triangular loop, la with an inner curl in its left hook and the gradually sharpened acute angles in pa and ma are among the other palaeographical changes that draw our attention. To add more, in the cases of i and ī as medial vowels, graphs are seen hanging down to the bottom of the parent letters, while the tick at the right end of medial ā lengthens down. On the other hand, left curves of the initial vowels u and o extend upwards.

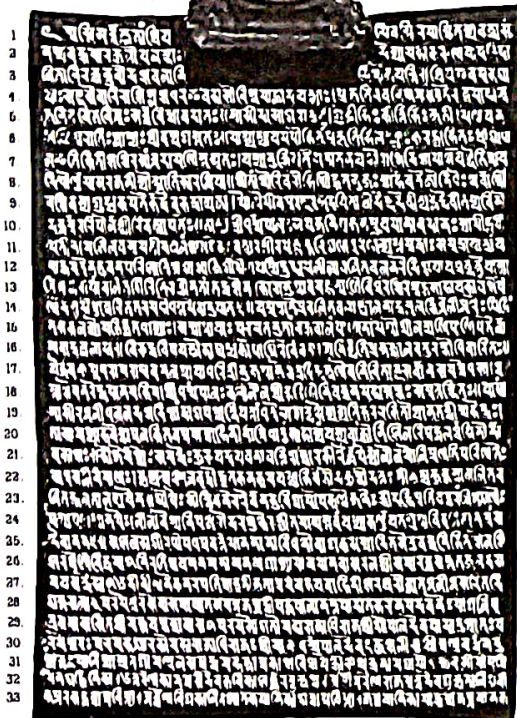
Further palaeographical transformation of the scripts on their way to the successive development can be

surveyed from the Khalimpur inscription dated in the year 32 of the reign of



Left: Image of Viṣṇu with inscription, written in Siddhamātrkā, in the pedestal

Image source: Enamul Haque / Adelbert J. Gail (eds.), *Sculptures in Bangladesh*, p. 400



Transcribed text in the pedestal: dānapatī apt līlāvatī (correctly: dānapatī līlāvatī)

Dharmapāla, Monghyr and Nalanda copper plates of the reign of Devapāla and the inscription of the reign of Mahendrapāla discovered at Jagjibanpur (Malda District). They are characterised by a wide vertical line on the right, au with an upward curve on the right of o having rounded angles and a tailed variety of flat topped e. Coming to the case of consonants, kha has sometimes been represented as open mouthed with a bar joining the right vertical and tha bearing a head-mark from which the spherical shape hangs down. The letter na is seen as open mouthed with its base slanting and right outer curve angular. A noticeable graphical representation

Left: Khalimpur Inscription of Dharmapāla

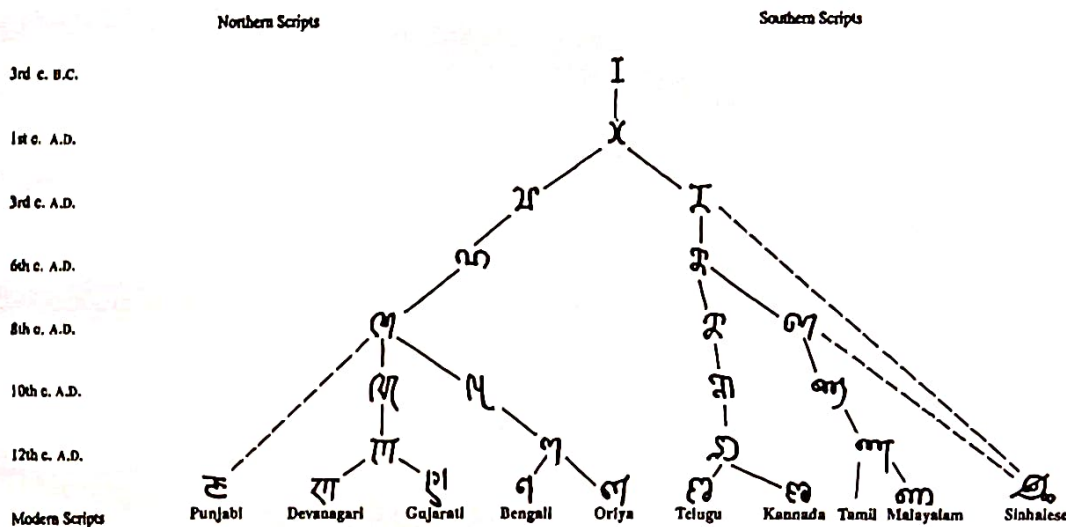
Below: Development of *ṇa* from early Brāhmī and its derivative scripts

is that of *sa* for its bent angular shape in both of its varieties viz., the looped form and the Nāgarī. Representation of conjuncts in the written documents is another palaeographical peculiarity of this phase, which to some extent makes the separate elements in the ligatures indistinguishable as in the case of *kṣakṣma* and *nna*. Problem of identifying the individual components arises

contemporaries, ascribable to the ninth and tenth centuries of the Current Era, are written in this script. Pervasive use of Siddhamāṭṛkā in Kashmir, Varanasi and Madhyadeśa, i.e. 'the Middle Country; all around the country of Kanauj, also called Āryāvarta, is mentioned by Al Beruni in the first half of the eleventh century. The script called Gaurī (i.e. Gauḍī), among the sub-regional scripts referred to by him,

is said to be in use in Pūrvadeśa or the Eastern country.

TABLE 2.4. The Development of *ṇa* in Brāhmī and Its Derivative Scripts



Note: This table presents in broad outline the development of a representative character, *ṇa*, from early Brāhmī to the major modern Indian scripts. Detailed charts for the development of each akṣara are provided in Sivaramamurti, IESIS 57-153

Image source:
Richard Salomon,
Indian Epigraphy,
p. 33.

primarily due to the vertical spaces in these entangled graphs of the conjuncts, for which either the initial fraction of the first member has to be represented or the succeeding member be twisted horizontally. In the course of graphical transformation this feature remained one of the factors behind the evolution of typical conjuncts present in Bengali script where original letters are occasionally unidentifiable.

Prevalence of the Siddhamāṭṛkā script in the Bengal region is said to have been existed until the end of the tenth century C.E. Epigraphic records of the Pālas and those of their East Indian

between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas and from the western to the eastern sea, Pūrvadeśa, however, lay to the east of Varanasi. Nevertheless, in matters relating to geographical distribution of the sub-regional scripts of India, al Beruni seems to have had been influenced by the information given in some early indigenous texts like the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra according to which Āryāvarta was practically conterminous with Madhyadeśa defined by Manu.

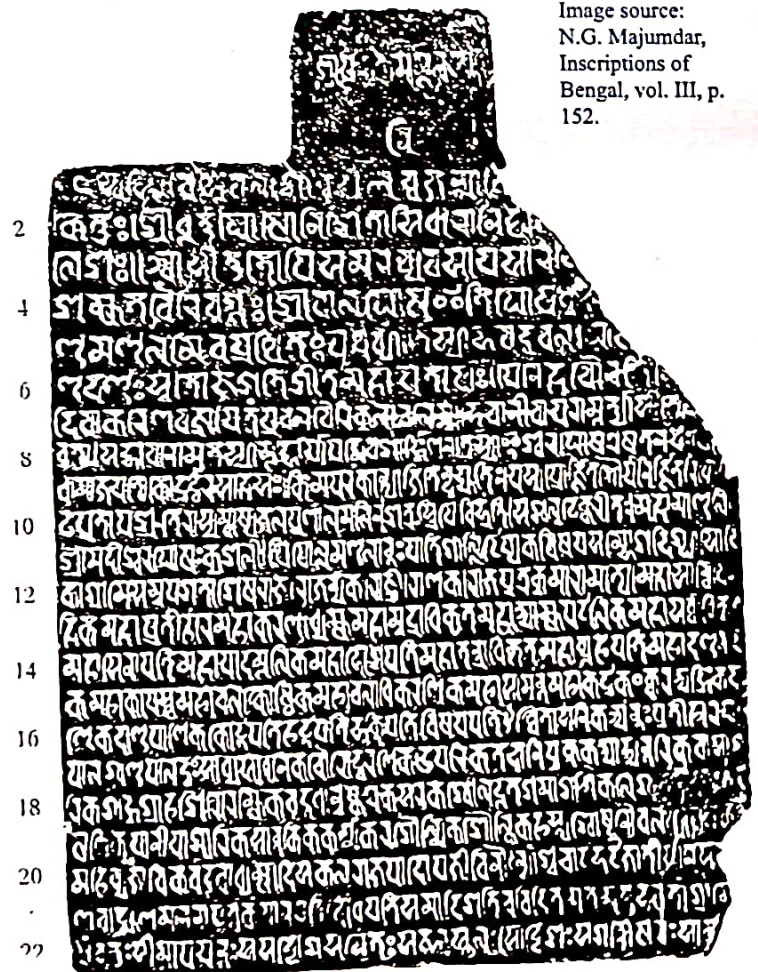
Al Beruni's statement, if taken at face value, would indicate that the script of eastern India had developed certain characteristics which were distinct from

those of the rest of northern India. The Gauḍī has been regarded as the same script to which is given the appellative 'Proto-Bengali'. In that case it must be conceded that the Proto Bengali script had evolved by the beginning of the eleventh century C.E. The actual difference between the Siddhamātṛkā and Gauḍī of the first half of that century is rather difficult to find out. We have a number of inscriptions and a few manuscripts belonging to the reigns of the Pālas and the Candras which can be ascribed to the period between c. C.E. 875 and c. C.E. 1025. In the Narayanpur image and Bangarh copper plate inscriptions of the reign of Mahīpāla I the head-marks in the form of solid triangles persist and the right hand verticals continue to bend. A tendency is, however, perceptible to close down the open mouth of such letters as pa, ma, ya and sa by lengthening the head-mark horizontally. This phenomenon can be traced in the Badal Pillar inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla who can be placed in the last quarter of the ninth and the first quarter of the tenth century C.E. The characteristics of Gauḍī were thus in existence, although in rudimentary forms, in the beginning of the tenth century. In some of the records of this period, e.g. the Rampal copper plate of the reign of Śrīcandra, the head-marks appear to flatten to some extent in comparison to the thick triangle-heads referred to above. Flattening of the serif becomes more prominent in the Imadpur (Muzaffarpur District, Bihar) Image inscription dated in the (regnal) year 48 of the (reign of Mahīpāla I, and in the Bangarh and Siyan inscriptions of the reign of Nayapāla. These epigraphs can be considered as belonging to the second quarter of the eleventh century C.E.

An important land-mark in the development of the Bengali script is the Ramganj (West Dinajpur District, West Bengal) copper plate inscription of Mahāṇḍalika Īśvaraghoṣa dated in the (regnal) year 35. On palaeographical grounds the record can be placed in the last quarter of the eleventh century C.E. Some of the characters employed in it are of immense importance. It is the earliest epigraph from Bengal which bears the letter ta with a tick rising upwards. The full-vowel / develops a tick at the right end of the upper horizontal bar above and aa curved hook below. Initial e takes a form which approaches the modern Bengali character. In line 35 of the

Below: Ramganj Copper Plate inscription of Īśvaraghoṣascripts

Image source:
N.G. Majumdar,
Inscriptions of
Bengal, vol. III, p.
152.



inscription the character for initial / has. been used in the word *īti*(*iti*) due to either the mistake of the scribe or the system of pronunciation in which distinction was hardly made between *i* and *ī*.

In relation to this, reference may be drawn regarding a manuscript, dated in the 39th regnal year of Harivarmadeva (c. CE 1073-1127). One of the folios of the manuscript contains the forms of the full vowels while the other bears the characters for the consonants. The dominions of Harivarman were confined to 'East Bengal'. The manuscript was apparently written down or copied somewhere within his kingdom. The forms of the letters may therefore, be taken as faithful representations of those used in Bengal in the first quarter of the twelfth century CE. The initial vowels, appearing in the record, are *a*, *ā*, *i*, *ī*, *u*, *ū* ṛ, ṝ, ṝ̄, *m* (in association *a*) *h* (in association with *a*), *e* and *ai*. The full vowel *i* has been formed by connecting the two circles and adding a short diagonal tick over the horizontal bar. *I* develop a tail below. *Ū* has been formed by appending a tail to the form for *u*. This is the first and solitary record of early medieval Bengal which bears the forms for *ṝ̄* and *ṝ̄̄*. The form for *ṝ̄̄* is also very rare, the earliest being noticeable in the Paschimbhag copper plate inscription of the year 5 of the reign of Śrīcandra (c. CE 925-75). With regard to the consonants, it may be noted that it is the only written document of early medieval Bengal which records the full-fledged form for *h*, elsewhere found invariably in conjunct with other consonants. Another notable feature is the form for *h* *a* conforming to that used in the modern Bengali. It may be added that we have two more manuscripts

dated in the year 8 of the reign of Harivarmadeva bearing the older form of *na* or the form noticeable in the epigraphs of the twelfth century CE.

Flattening of the solid-triangle head-marks perceptible in the inscriptions of the first half of the eleventh century led to the developments of hooks issuing out of the left corner of the serifs. The letters seem to hang down from these hooks. They are clearly visible in the epigraphs of the twelfth century. The Belawa copper plate inscription of the year 5 of the reign of Bhojavarman (c. CE 1137-45), Deopara Praśasti of the reign of Vijayasena (c. CE 1096-1158) and the Naihati copper plate of the year 11 of the reign of Ballālasena (c. CE 1159-79) illustrate these characters. The other notable feature of the style exemplified in these documents is that the right-hand verticals of the letters straighten down before taking a sharp bend at the bottom. The manuscripts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries from eastern India are also characterised by this feature., which appears to have relevance to the study of calligraphy rather than to the direct development of the Bengali script.

The Belava copper plate inscription of the year 5 of the reign of Bhojavarman happens to be the earliest epigraphic record from Bengal to bear the sign for nasal candrabindu. The form is the same as we use it to-day. In the said inscription it has been used for writing *om̐* (*o* surmounted by the candrabindu). In the Anulia inscription dated in the year 3 of the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena, however, the anusvāra has been dropped in favour of candrabindu for writing *kṣetrakarāmś ca* and *anyāmś ca* in II.33 and 32

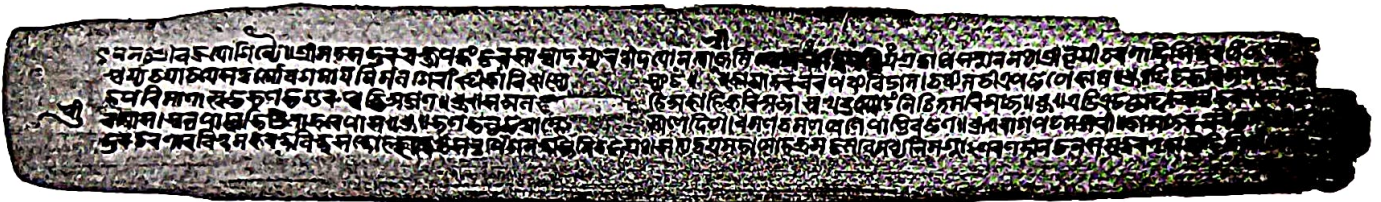
respectively.

The Khalimpur inscription, dated in the year 32 of the reign of Dharmapāla, bears a sign in 1.30 of the obverse which conforms to the form used in Bengali script for anusvara. The text of the inscription indicates that it is apparently a mistake for the spirant (visarga). Nevertheless, it

fourteenth century.

A copper plate inscription of the reign of Vijayamāṇikya, dated in the year 1410 of the Saka era (i.e., CE 1478), furnishes us with valuable materials with regard to the characters prevalent in Bengal in the fifteenth century. The letters hang down from long horizontal lines similar to those found

Below: Image of a folio of Caryāpada, written in Bengali script



proves the prevalence of the sign in the beginning of the ninth century C.E. It may be regarded as an early instance of the use of the typical Bengali sign for the nasal glide. The sign for khaṇḍata in its rudimentary form is also noticed in the Khalimpur inscription (II. 29 and 61). Use of the hook, mentioned earlier, is found occasionally in the inscriptions of the thirteenth century. The serif or the mātrā happens to be in the form of straight lines. In the Edilpur and Calcutta Sahitya Parishat copper plate inscriptions the right-hand verticals do not bend suddenly at the bottom though the tendency is found in the Mehar copper plate dated in the year 1156 of the Śaka era. Nevertheless, the document from Mehar contains some characteristic forms relevant to the study of the development of the Bengali script. These are the forms for pa (also found in the manuscripts of the Rāmacarita and Caryāgīti), representation of the conjuncts kṣa and kta. Specimens of writing available to us do not indicate any substantial development of the 'Proto-Bengali' in the

in the Bihar Sharif stone slab, dated in the year 1553 of the VikramaSamvat (i.e., CE 1496). The medial vowel marks for i and ī approximate those used in modern Bengali, the lunate member in medial i being distinguished from the vertical bar. Among the consonants, pa, na and the ligature hu (h with medial u) attain to modern forms. The said inscription of Vijayamāṇikya I is the earliest epigraph in which ṣa has been represented with a pair of circles approaching the present figure. Attempts have been made to represent ra by either dissecting the triangle of va or incising a pellet within the triangle or by an unqualified triangle. These features of ra can be traced in the inscriptions of the Malla rulers also. In Bishnupur Shyam Rai temple inscription, dated in the year 949 of the Malla era (i.e., CE 1643), the figure for ra^{1.2} bears the blob located outside the triangle and below the lower rib on the left. An earlier instance of the form is found in the manuscript of the Karmavipāka (Asiatic Society, no, G 807) bearing the date Śaka 1517 (i.e. CE 1595). Another manuscript of a text entitled

Khaṇḍanoddhāra preserved in the Asiatic Society (no, G 1492) bears the same form for ra. It is dated in the year 1410 of the Śāka era (i.e. CE 1488). The overall appearance of and certain characters employed in the manuscript, however, indicate a later date. The date could have been that of the original manuscript from which the present one was copied down. Several manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are known to us illustrating the form of ra which simulates the present shape of the letter concerned. The process of the development, however, was not an uninterrupted one. As late as the first half of the nineteenth century the older form of ra with bisected triangle is regularly found in manuscripts and inscriptions.

An epigraph from Wari (Malda District, West Bengal) dated in the year 1467 of the Śāka era (i.e., CE 1545) indicates full-fledged development of the letters like ṛ, kha, gha, da, dha, śa, sa and that of the conjunct nda the ticks of ṭa and ṭha, however, hang down from the roof and do not surmount it. Inscriptions and manuscripts written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represent sometimes older forms and sometimes new ones of the letters. Occasionally queer forms have been used, perhaps, due to either ignorance of the scribe or the system of pronunciation. Thus, the Kabilaspur (Birbhum District, West Bengal) inscription, dated in the year 1565 of the Śāka era (=C.E. 1643) bears the figure for the conjunct srī (śrī) which has been formed by juxtaposing vertically the letters sa and ra with sign for medial ī emanating from the middle of the vertical on the right. The same method has been followed in writing pri

in 1.4 of the Sankari temple inscription at Khandaghosh (Burdwan District, West Bengal) dated Śāka 1595 (i.e., CE 1673). A strange form of visarga is found in the Madanmohan temple inscription at Raniyara (Bankura District, West Bengal), dated in the year 976 of the Malla era (i.e., CE 1670).

The Code of Gentoo Laws, a translation by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed from the Persian version of a Sanskrit text on law of inheritance, published from London in 1776, bears a chart of the forms of the vowels and the consonants in Bengali alphabet, which had been in existence in Bengal in the second half of the eighteenth century (Plate II, Preface p. XXIV). The table of alphabets shows sixteen vowels including ṛ, Ṛ, anusvāra and visarga; and thirty-four consonants with the last letter being 'khyā' (i.e., kṣa). Athansius Kircher in *China Illustrata* or *China Monumentis*, published from Amsterdam in 1667, put a chart of the Bengali alphabet as appendix, where separate existence of the letter kṣa is shown too. Undoubtedly, this tradition can be traced from an earlier period. In the manuscript of the reign of Harivarman, mentioned earlier, both anusvāra and visarga are treated as vowels. Comparison regarding the graph for the very last letter of the consonants in this document can be made with the form of the conjunct kṣa recorded in the Deopara Praśasti of the reign of Vijayasena. The Sanskrit lexicon *Ekākṣarakośa*, attributed to Puruṣottamadeva, alludes to sixteen vowels (including anusvāra and visarga) and thirty-four consonants, the last one being kṣa. It is explained in the *Varṇadeśanā*, another work ascribed to Puruṣottamadeva, that the confusion

As a consequence of indistinguishable pronunciation of these two letters, the graph of ba, square in shape, became gradually obsolete from the Bengali alphabet. Although the omission should have descended on va for its indistinctive utterance from that of ba.

We observe certain peculiarities in the script, from different periods, of written documents found in Bengal. The graph of sa appears to be more similar to that of śa in the Mahasthangarh tablet, palaeographically datable to 3rd century BCE. In later periods also this feature seems to be in continuation as in the cases of some epigraphs of the 5th century CE, discovered from 'North Bengal'. One copper plate inscription, dated the year 120 (of the Gupta period), from Kalaikuri perhaps holds the best

illustration of graphical features of letters. The medial e, calligraphically written on the top left side as *prṣṭhamātrā* of the parent letter to which it is attached, eventually developed the tendency of sloping down from the top of left which led to the gradual lengthening of the graph till it reached the bottom of the parent letter. The earliest instance of the *prṣṭhamātrā*, till date, is found in the Mainamati (Comilla District, Bangladesh) copper plate grant, issued in the reign of Bhavadeva. Use of both of the serif marks of *prṣṭhamātrā* and *śiromātrā* happen to be found in the inscriptions belonging to the second half of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century CE (cf. the Badal Praśasti of the reign of Nārāyaṇapāla). For the graphs of medial e and o further we must look into the copper plate grants of



Image of folios of a manuscript of *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva written in Bengali script of 15th-16th century

Śrīcandra and Laḍahacandra, found from the sites of Rampal, Paschimbhag and Mainamati.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar reformed the Bengali alphabetical system. In the preface of Part 1 of the first edition of the *Vaṇaparicaya*, appeared in Vikrama Samvat 1912, he clearly differentiated separate graphs, with and without a dot at the

the lower rib of ya; the manuscript of the *Vaiṣṇavamāhātmya* (Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, no. 473), dated 1366 of the Śaka era (i.e. CE 1444), represents the letter under consideration both with a sword mark' and a blob, the former apparently being compressed into the latter. In the state of West Bengal till date the probable earliest instance of ya with a circle beneath is observed in an epigraph from Chhatna in the Bankura district, dated in the year 1655

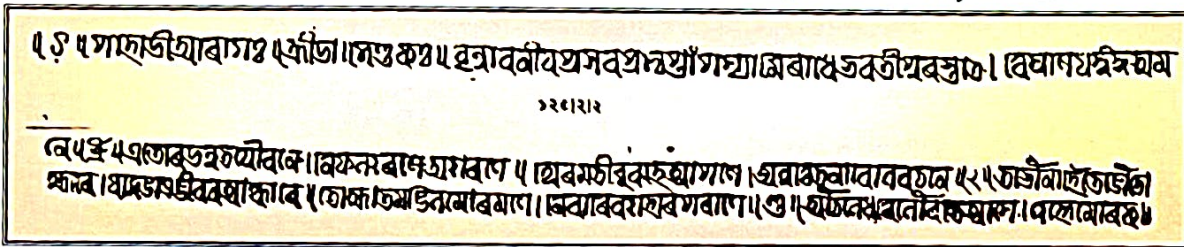


Image of folios of a manuscript of Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa written in Bengali script of 16th-17th century

bottom, of ḍa, ḍha and ya (written as W, X, h and o, p, q) in the Bengali alphabet; and specified that the dotted characters are to be treated distinctly from the ones without dots, due to their discrete forms and pronunciations. This declaration regarding the differentiation of graphs of the letters mentioned, admittedly implies that the forms of those had been prevalent from an earlier period. Though Ram Mohan Ray did not consider the two forms for the letters ḍa and ḍha to be individual ones, he certainly acknowledged the different pronunciation of those. Records of two manuscripts, namely Kusumāñjaliprakāśa and Vaiṣṇavamāhātmya, of fifteenth century CE prove the independent presence of dotted ya, indicating its distinct pronunciation from that of the one without dot. While the manuscript of Kusumāñjaliprakāśa (Asiatic Society, no. G 794), dated 1342 Śaka year (i.e. CE 1420), bears the representation of dotted ya, formed by adding a 'sword mark' below

of the Śaka era (CE 1733).

Until now no representation of dotted ḍa (o) or ḍha (p) is found in the inscriptions that can be dated between the beginning of the fifteenth and end of the nineteenth century. We may here refer to a 16th century manuscript of the text *Dharmaratna*, noticed by H.P. Shastri, which records the word āṣāḍha with dotted ḍha along with the year Śaka 1475 (i.e., CE 1553) in the horoscope section, appended to the text. This one is the only instance in whole of the sixteenth century of the graph of dotted ḍha present in the modern Bengali alphabet, although the graphical characters used in the manuscript for writing the date mentioned cannot be ascribed to the sixteenth century. The forms of ḍa and ḍha, both with a pellet, are found in the manuscript of the *Khaṇḍanoddhāra* mentioned earlier. Though, as stated before, it does not appear to be as early as CE 1488.

A manuscript of the Kīrātaparvan of the Mahābhārata (now preserved in the North Bengal State Library, Cooch Behar), dated Śaka 1527 (i.e., CE 1605), seemingly holds evidence of dotted ḍa in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Numerous occurrences of this letter are noticed further in manuscripts of the eighteenth century. Mention of two more manuscripts regarding the same may be made here, one is a copy of Padmapurāṇa, dated in Śaka 1675 (CE 1753), preserved in the North Bengal State Library in Cooch Behar, and the other one is of Napuṁśakāṇḍa, dated in the year 1705 of the Śaka era (CE 1783), preserved in the Malda District Museum.

Use of dotted ḍa as a distinct letter in the Bengali alphabet in the medieval period is undoubtedly proven by the examples given above. In all probabilities existence of dotted ḍha in the same period, though not represented frequently in the written documents datable to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, may be postulated. Although the Ekākṣarakośa and the Code of Gentoo Law do not show the graphs of dotted ḍa, ḍha and ya, it is evident that in the medieval era innovations in way to distinguish their sounds from those of the graphs without dots were definitely made.

In case of conjuncts component members are observed to be gradually shortened or placed horizontally, retaining older forms in some cases, which in turn led to the development of some Bengali characters like those of kta, kra, ṣṇa, stha etc.

For the development of numerical characters, inscriptions of ancient and medieval Bengal are of immense help to us. Notation for 90, found on the obverse of a terracotta seal from the region of

Chandraketugarh in the North 24 Parganas, is the earliest inscribed evidence from Bengal having a numerical sign. The Dhanaidaha copper plate inscription of the year 113 (of the Gupta era) bears three different symbols denoting 100, 10 and 3. The earliest attempt at using the decimal system is detectable in line 27 of the Egra copper plate inscription of the reign of Śaśāṅka, that shows the sign for hundred (100) followed by a pair of blobs. Unambiguous use of this system in Bengal is noticed for the first time in the Asrafpur copper plate of the reign of Devakhaḍga, where instead of using symbols for 10 and 3 while showing the date, numerical notations of 1 and 3 are used respectively. It is quite interesting to see that the Sahitya Parishat copper plate inscription of the reign of Viśvarūpasena bears signs indicating fractions. They may be compared to the symbols once used to denote annas when sixteen of them made a rupee. Besides this, the Mehar copper plate of Śaka 1156 (CE 1234) contains a number of signs which seem to indicate 4 and its multiples. The same symbols appear to have been used for denoting fractions of measurements relating to flat areas of land.

For the punctuation marks either a single vertical line (daṇḍa) or double verticals joined by a short horizontal line are seen to be used quite frequently. The Mahasthangarh tablet (c. 3rd century BCE) bears the earliest evidence of using punctuation marks. Application of floral designs, occasionally within a square, is observed in case of indicating either half or full stop, though sometimes they were used with the purpose of filling in the blanks left by the scribe out of mistake. Attempts were also seen to be made at inserting letters, which were dropped by

the artisans. For instance, in the Badal pillar inscription, Viṣṇubhadra, engraver of the record, had put the letter bha below between ṣṇu and dra, as he accidentally missed the letter while inscribing his own name. This practice has often been followed in manuscripts in which the dropped letters are normally written on the space on the margins.

Last but not the least the avagraha sign has often been used, standing for the elided (lupta) a. The inscriptions normally begin with siddham expressed by a symbol which looks like either a khaṇḍata or an elephant's trunk hanging down.

Evolution of Bengali Alphabets

[illegible]

New Version of Bengali Alphabet											
Cursive											
৐	ঐ	ঔ	ঋ	ঌ	ৠ	ৡ	ৢ	ৣ	৤	৥	০
+	+	+	+	ক	খ	গ	ঘ	ঙ	চ	ছ	জ
১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২
৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯
৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭
৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯
৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০
০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১
১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২
২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩
৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪
৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫
৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬
৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭
৭	৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮
৮	৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯
৯	০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০
০	১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১
১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	৯	০	১	২
২	৩	৪	৫								

[illegible][illegible]

Conclusion

The relationship between a language and its script is arbitrary. A language can be written in any script. A particular script evolves when a speech community feels the need to record their speech. A script must have the power to represent speech in writing. Generally, there cannot be a script without a language. In modern times, a script is inevitable for a language. Ideally, every language should have its own script to be able to express the unique sounds in those languages. A writing system for Bangla evolved in course of its development. Originally, during the reign of the Pāla dynasty (750-1154 AD) in the eastern India, and even earlier, perhaps during the Malla period (694 AD onwards), the present-day Bangla writing system got a shape comparable to the modern-day ones. Almost all the scripts of so-called Neo Indo-Aryan languages, of which Bangla claims to be one of the most important members, followed the alphabetical system of Sanskrit, but Bangla has its own phonological peculiarities that is represented through its writing system. There are two es in Bangla alphabetical system which are same in shape and pronunciation. Of the two es, one represents the *vargīya ba* (Nāgarī बा), and the other stands for *antayastha va* (Nāgarī वा). Both the es are pronounced as *vargīya ba /ba/* in Bangla. This is a unique feature that makes Bangla starkly different from any other Neo Indo-Aryan language. We get the reflection of this practice way back in the 3rd century BC in the Girnar Inscription of Aśoka, where a Bengali scribe engraved *vargīya ba* for *antayastha va*. The word *dvādaśa* was engraved as *dbādasa*. This is typically a Bengali character that got attested for the first time in writing in the 3rd century BC. This proves with certainty that the Bengali as a speech community expressed their linguistic peculiarity in writing ever since 3rd century BC, which still prevails. Bengali script is an integral part of its identity. This got substantiated when East Pakistan issued an order for writing Bangla in Urdu script right after the partition in 1947 and the entire Bengali community stood in protest to claim their right for their own script. As a claimant for assigning Classical status, Bangla language along with its script is one of the fittest candidates for being awarded the classical status.

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Chapter Ten

Bengali Literature, Its Ancestry and the Legacy

Rajib Chakraborty
Somnath Chakraborty
Sayak Basu

বিশ্বনাথ চক্রবর্তী
কবিদেবীমণ্ডল
কবিদেবীমণ্ডল
কবিদেবীমণ্ডল
কবিদেবীমণ্ডল
কবিদেবীমণ্ডল

Right: Image from Deux
Lexiques Sanskrit_
Chinois



A photograph of a long, narrow, dark, textured object, possibly a piece of wood or bark, with a vertical line of text written on it. The text is in a cursive script and appears to be a list or a series of names. The object is oriented vertically, and the text is written along its length.

Image of a folio
of a manuscript of
Caryāpada

- *Caryāpada*, which was composed

in the 7th century AD, is the earliest literary expression (discovered so far) in Bengali language. Its composition in the 7th century is proof enough of a thirteen hundred years of ancestry of Bengali language in the written form. Interestingly, in an 8th century Sanskrit Chinese dictionary, edited by Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, we get words like *āt*

不 時 老 虎	林 野 老 虎	多 引 藤 池	知 如 四	野 底 下	城 多
雷	風	星	雲	往	去
尾 作 皮 仁	情 羅 沙 仁	素 路 仁 多	尾 即 作 路	何 伊 金	城 伊 銀 里 河 鄉 仁
電	雨	流	散	來	取

(*āṭā*), *col* (*cāul*), *mug*, *khot* (*khat*), *mos* (*māch*), *hot* (*hāt*), *eh* (*ei*), *moish* (*boyish*), *bhotār* (*bhātār*), *moṭṭo* (*moṭā*), *loi* (*laiyā*), *phedh* (*dur korā*), *boshon* (*bosha*) etc. These are all Bengali words. For example, there is the word *āiso* (*ayish*) as the synonym for the Sanskrit word *āgacchā*. This word also is a Bengali word. According to French scholar Sylvain Levi, in 657 A.D. during the period of King Narendra Deb, Matsyendranāth who is also known as Mīnanātha according to *Nāthagītikā*, travelled to Nepal. He was the founder and propagator of *Nāthism* and also happens to be the oldest writer in the Bengali language, as has been recognized by many. Therefore, we can evidently claim that the year 650 A.D. was the temporal genesis point of written Bengali literature.

● The next great landmark in the study of Bangla, after the Caryās, is the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* of Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa. This work from the point of view of language, is of unique character in Middle Bengali literature. The manuscript of the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* was discovered by Basanta-Ranjan Rāy Vidvadbhalla and was published by the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat in 1916. The grammar of the speech of the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* gives a clue to many of the forms of New Bengali. The *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* belongs to the Early Middle Bengali stage. The poem is remarkable in more than one respect. The language presents an old form of middle Bengali. The structure of the poem is quite unlike the usual narrative type. The tone of the poem is entirely secular, often verging on crudeness and vulgarity. In form and technique *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* differs from all other narrative poems on the story of Kṛṣṇa. The story is carried entirely through dialogue and trialogue of songs and the songs are almost always strung by a single or a double verse in Sanskrit, somewhat in the manner of Jaideva's *Gīta Govinda*. Such a narrative or dramatic poem comprising entirely of talks between two or three persons were known as *Vāgveṇī* (speech pleating) or *vāk-keṇī* (speech play) in high (i.e. Sanskrit and Prakṛit) literature and as Jhumur in low (i.e. vernacular) literature. Some of these connecting verses in Sanskrit are rather good, and it can be surmised that the poet possessed some skill in Sanskrit versification.

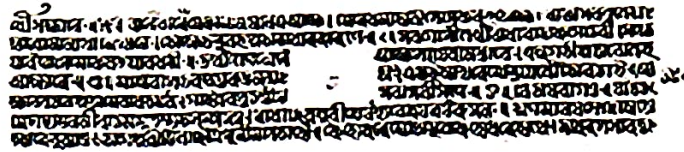
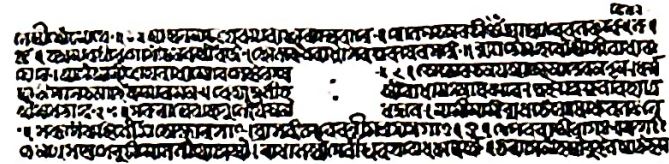
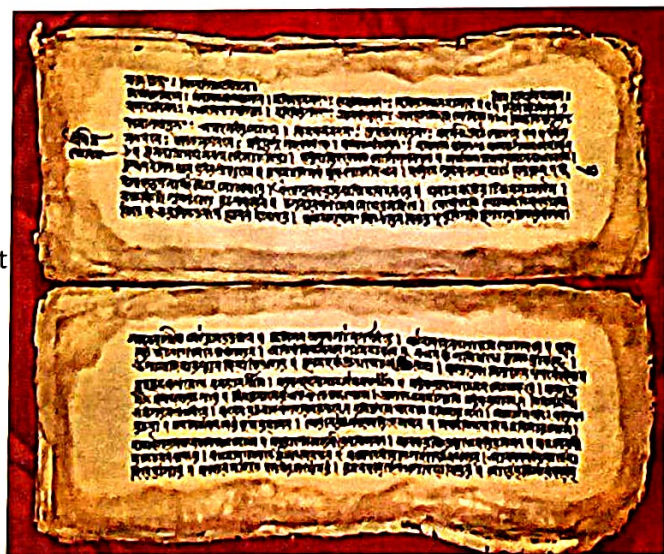


Image of a folio of
a manuscript of
Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana



During the entire Middle Bengali Period a distinct poetic language or jargon was cultivated almost exclusively by the Vaiṣṇav lyric poets. This poetic language or *Kunstsprache* is called Brajabuli, meaning the language of Vraja (Brindāvan) and it was by no means exclusively used by the Bengali writers. The language has as its basis the tradition of Avahatṭha poetry. The vogue of Brajabuli did not die out with Middle Bengali. Under the strong influence of Vaiṣṇava poetry it lingered throughout the nineteenth century. Its last great writer was the young Rabindranath Tagore. The most fruitful of his earliest attempts in lyric composition are the songs written in Brajabuli and bearing the signature *Bhānusiṃha*.

Image of a folio of
a manuscript of
Gītāgovinda



Middle Bengali as a whole appears as a pan-Bengali literary language based mainly on the dialect of West Bengal. But the early writers hailing from the different parts of the country and its fringes did not hesitate to use their own dialectal forms and idioms. For instance, some of the most influential followers of Chaitanya came from Sylhet and Chittagong, and through their writings a good number of words from the dialects of those regions were introduced in the written language. There was a steady flow of Sanskrit words and these came generally via the popular mythological and epic stories that formed some of the main themes of Middle Bengali literature. Continued borrowing from Sanskrit no doubt strengthened the literary language but at the same time it was accentuating its separation from the spoken tongue.

● As literary expression in a language cannot prosper without a pre-history of development and evolution of the language, the written literature in Bengali proves its earlier genesis and growth and maturation into a medium of literary expression.

● The presence of oral traditions in Bengali language—folk, songs, proverbs, riddles, stories—that were

the Buddhist past and relate the struggles, aspirations and anxieties of an ancient agricultural community.

● The maritime history of Bengal finds expression in its literature, proverbs and other oral forms. For example, the Maṅgal Kāvya relates stories of its economic transactions with the outside

Right: Textual description of trade journey found in Manasāmaṅgalakāvya

মনসাঈবল । ৫

দব গুণ বন্দো ভাই হেঁট(১) করে মাথা ।
 ঘরের গুণ বন্দি আপন পিতামাতা ।
 ঘোহিনী ঘোহিনী বান্দো বক প্রেত কৃত ।
 কার নাম জানি বাকি আরে বহুত ।
 ঘুমি মোর ভগিনী তোমার আমি ভাই ।
 আসরে করিলে বা মনসার ঘোহাই ।
 ঘোহাই না মান যদি মোরে কর বা ।
 তবে পিতাগুর দাখাতে পাখাল বাম পা ।
 বড় বড় গুণ বন্দো কামাখ্যা-কামিনী ।
 তোমার লাগতে আমি কি বলিতে জানি ।
 বন্দনা করিতে ভাই হবে অনুকণ ।
 একরে বন্দিয়ে পাইব সব বৈবরণ ।
 ব্রাহ্মণ বৈকল পথে করি মনসার ।
 মনসা-মহল গীত করিব উত্তার ।
 ক্ষেমানক পিত বলে করিয়ে মিনতি ।
 আসরে করব বোলা মেঘি পদাঘতি ।

সদাগরের সিংহল বাত্না ।

ততকালে বান্দো ঘোহী মনসার চরণ ।
 ওয়া কলিলা(২) ছাড়িয়ে পো আসরে বৈব মন ।
 তন তন সর্গজন করি সিয়েবন ।
 মনসার মহল গীত করব ব্রবণ ।

(১) হেঁট—দগল । (২) কলিলা—পীঠ, আয়তন ।

Image of a folio of a manuscript of Mahābhārata



orally transmitted from generation to generation, proves the ancient status of the language. The oral narratives fall back on The Rāmāyaṇa, The Mahābhārata and

world. This again sits harmoniously with and dovetails the historical evidence of Ptolemy talking about the prominence of Bengal as a maritime business power. This proves the ancestry of the people of Bengal and its language.

● The rich and enviable history of Bengali literary and cultural history is mapped. The contribution of the Bengali in the cultural, intellectual and political history of India is highlighted. The presence of a rich and variegated literature in Bengali clearly points out the ancient origin and development of Bengali language into a medium of

literary expression. Such ancestry of the language, needless to say, strongly supports its claim for a classical status.

The Vaiṣṇava Poets

Love when you have learnt the meaning of love.

Love is not a mere word. Choose a teacher.

Chandidas and Rajakini were the crown jewels of love.

They were one in death.

These beautiful lines aptly introduce the great Vaiṣṇava poet, Caṇḍīdāsa (fourteenth century) captivated the heart of rural Bengal first as an ideal lover and then as a poet of love.

He was a temple priest who learnt the meaning of love from a Rajakini (a washerwoman) named Rami. He was excommunicated by his caste and lived the hard life of a wandering singer. The Lila of Radha and Krishna was the theme then in great vogue all over Northern India. Jayadeva who composed in Sanskrit, Vidyāpati who wrote in Maithili and Mirabai who sang in early Hindi were not exactly contemporaries of Caṇḍīdāsa but they belonged to the same age of mystic love celebrated in poems and folk tales. Chandidas, who had his own Sadhana of love, found it a theme after his heart.

His 'Radha' is an iconic text that captures pangs of love and passion.

Who says love is good?

I loved that I might be happy.

And I have been crying all my life.

This is her plaintive cry. Chandidas reunites her to her beloved, contrary

to legend, in an eternity of 'Bhāva Sammilana' which can be freely translated as spiritual union.

Although he idealized Radha and Krishna as lovers, Chandidas did not deify them. It was as human beings that they figured in his lyrics. Strictly speaking, he was not a Vaishnava but a Sahajiyā. There existed at that time an esoteric cult known as the Sahajiyā, a term implying ease. It was a mysterious form of Buddhism, differing from other ascetic cults in that its devotees lived in couples, practicing the delicate and restrained art of ascetic love. Men and women were comrades in spiritual discipline, believing that the greatest self-control could only so be attained. Theirs was an affirmative creed, accepting life and seeking to control it through controlling themselves. Many were called and few chosen. 'Everyone talks of Sahaja,' exclaims Caṇḍīdāsa, 'but who knows what it means!' Despite its name, it was about as easy as plunging into water without getting wet or making a frog dance in a snake's mouth.

Chandidas as a priest had served a Buddhist goddess, Vāsali, which indicates his Buddhist affinities. There are Sahajiyā poems attributed to him which are intelligible only to the initiates of the cult. One of these opens with the noble lines,

Listen, brother men,

Man is the highest truth,

None is higher than he.

Similar lines are to be found in the songs of the Bauls who were known for celebrating a strong undercurrent of humanism from time immemorial. The mānuṣ or 'man' of these mystics does not

set himself up against the Sain, or Lord. God is in man's image. In this Man is that Man,' sings the Baul. Man contains Him in himself and therefore the human body is sacred, a veritable place of pilgrimage where one can attain salvation.

For simplicity, sweetness and pathos Chandidas is unrivalled. His songs go straight to the heart. For five centuries people have wept over them and about a hundred years after his death Sri Chaitanya, the great Vaishnava saint, incorporated them into the sacred literature of his sect. His padāvali which contains his lyrics on Radha and Krishna is popular to this day. For the most part the poet's audiences were composed of unsophisticated villagers who gathered round him in the evening after their day's work in the fields or followed him from fair to fair. He sang to them of his love with candour, vigour and a directness of diction born of the soil. But as a craftsman he was excelled by both Jayadeva and Vidyāpati, whose works are faultless in form and in composition.

Vidyāpati, though a Maithil, is traditionally regarded as sharing with Chandidas the honours of old Bengali literature, in defiance of geography and philology. Vidyāpati's writings were eagerly read in Bengal and some Bengali poets, aspirants after a vicarious immortality, even adopted 'Vidyāpati' as a pen-name. Such was the influence that Vidyāpati (fourteenth century) exercised over Bengali thought. He was a learned Brahman of Mithila who became the court poet of Raja Siva Sinha in the same region (North Bihar). According to legends, his desire for the Rani is compared with 'the desire of the moth for the star'. However,

this fact did not prevent his being a friend to the Raja. Like Chandidas, he sang of his love as the love of Radha and Krishna. Vidyāpati reveals himself in these poignant lines:

Since my birth have I feasted on beauty,
Yet my eyes are insatiate,
For ages have I pressed heart upon
heart,
yet mine knows no peace.

Unlike Caṇḍīdāśa, he lacks the spiritual insight and the emotional depth. But he compensates with his marvelous command of metre and his exquisite diction. His delineation of beauty in all its forms and celebration of sophisticated worldly love stamps him undoubtedly as a great master. After Kalidasa, Vidyāpati seems to have most influenced Rabindranath Tagore. Despite differences in their languages, these three great Indian poets are in the same tradition. They celebrated the vast natural beauty of India with all its diversity.,

Caṇḍīdāśa and Vidyāpati were equally popular and their paths were followed by poets of generations to come. They became known as the Vaishnava School of poets. Almost invariably they took the surname of Das, or servant of God, and were very devout Vaiṣṇavas. Some were stern ascetics. The best known are Jñānāśa, Gobindāśa, Balarāmdāśa, Narottamdāśa, and Rayśekhara. To them Radha and Krishna were divine and they regarded Sri Chaitanya as the incarnation of the united pair. The delighted and delightful lovers became the masculine and feminine principles of the Universe.

Jñānāśa (sixteenth century) was a simple, unpretentious pure disciple of

Chandidas. He composed his songs in a Bengali as unaffected as it is moving, with a sincerity and a spontaneous grace that made him Chandidas's worthy successor.

Gobindadāsa (sixteenth century) took Vidyāpati as his master, wrote in his style and imitated his language. He is rumoured to have been a Maithil as well. The way he glorified sensuous beauty and manipulated metres while choosing words is second only to his illustrious predecessor. The poets who were Vidyāpati's followers evolved a poetic dialect of their own called Brajabuli.

More than being individual poets or personalities Jñāndās, Gobindadās, or their fellow minstrels should better be looked at as a community. They had formed separate communities of their own cutting across castes and became the voices of the community as a whole. There were many of them, including some women and some Mussalmans. The Padas (the general names by which their songs came to be known) ran into hundreds of thousands. They were composed in the traditional forms and confined their subject matter to the traditional cycle of themes centering around the Līlā of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and typically would open with a hymn to Caitanya. They also championed worldly love as well.

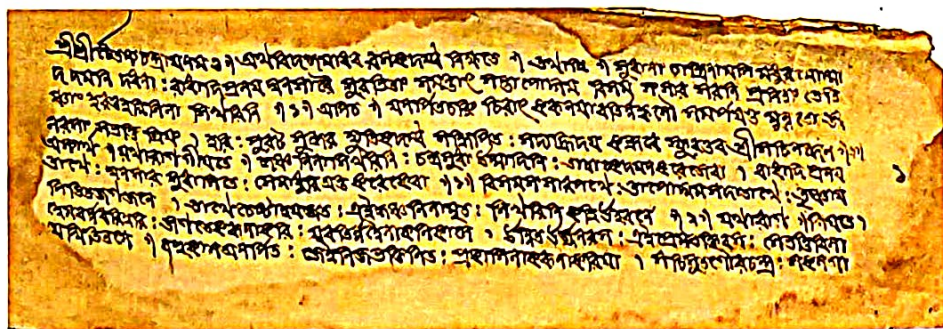
All the Vaiṣṇava lyrics were set to music and sung at their festivals. The manner of singing became so characteristic to these songs that they came to be regarded as a distinct type of musical composition called 'Kīrtans'. One can say that Kīrtans are to Bengal what the Bhajans are to

other provinces.

The Bhakti Movement and the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism

The whole of northern India experienced a vital outburst of the devotional discipline known as the Bhakti movement in the fifteenth century. There were two distinct currents in the spread of devotionalism in the fifteenth century—one was that of Rāmānanda Swāmī's and the other one was initiated by Mādhavendra Purī. Mādhavendra was the founder of the Vaiṣṇava centre at Mathurā which was shifted to Brindāvan by Sanātana and Rūpa Goswāmī at the instance of Chaitanya, who located some of the holy sites relating to the Vajra legend. Madhavendra's most renowned disciple was Īśvara Purī, a native of Kumārahaṭṭa which was located 25 miles north of Kolkata. This Īśvara Purī was the guru of Chaitanya. The two most ardent followers of Chaitanya were Advaita and Nityānanda. Madhavendra being close to both Nityānanda and Advaita, made long treks from Mathurā to South India and back via Bengal and Odisha and brought sandal-wood for the service of his ikon.

Image of a folio of a manuscript of Vidagdha Mādhava



Thus, Madhavendra brought together two streams of Bhakti from the South and the North. In course of such a journey Madhavendra met Mālādhara Vasu, the author of the first Bengali adaptation

of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Bengal Vaiṣṇavism drew for its inspiration on the text of the *Bhāgavata* which was probably of South Indian (Karnāṭaka) origin. It seems to have been brought to Bengal by Karnāṭaka immigrants long settled in Mithilā. Two of Hussain Shah's most trusted officers were the brothers Sanātan and Rūpa whose ancestors had belonged to Karnāṭa and we know that before the brothers met Caitanya, they had been imbibing *Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavism*. By the end of fifteenth century the study of the *Bhāgavata* by devotional Vaiṣṇavas had come to Śāntipur and Navadvīp (Nadia) which had then become the best centres of Brāhmaṇism and Sanskrit learning. Only ambitious scholars with court connections would go to Gauṛa and risk the contamination of the court atmosphere and the odium of foreign contact. Caitanya (his real name was Viśvambhar) was born at Navadvīp in March 1486. His father Jagannātha Miśra originally belonged to North-east Bengal (Sylhet). His mother Śacī was a disciple of Advaita Ācārya, the learned influential pundit from Sylhet. Caitanya's elder brother Viśvarūpa was a serious pupil of Advaita Ācārya. Caitanya wholeheartedly pursued the path of knowledge. He established himself as a grammarian as well as a public intellectual.

At the age of sixteen Caitanya started his own school at Navadvīp. To perform the last rites of his father Caitanya went to Gayā and met Īśvara Purī, a disciple of Madhavendra Purī and took spiritual initiation from him. This was perhaps the most significant event in Caitanya's life. This meeting with Īśvar Purī suddenly turned Caitanya, a well-posted acknowledged leader of the young

scholars of Navadvīp, into an emotional mystic. Caitanya was accepted as the leader of the small circle formed by what may be called the 'underground' Vaṣṇavas of Navadvīp. Caitanya and his companions in faith took the various names of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu as the only act of worship, which they recited, sang and danced together. This was beginning of *Samkīrtana* (singing together the name of God) introduced by Caitanya as the sole act of public worship. It was also a vicarious beginning of the assertion of the public right of freedom for divine worship. The novelty of *Samkīrtana* caught the fancy of the people. Men who did not like Caitanya complained to the Kazi (Muslim magistrate) of the locality. As a result, *Samkīrtana* in public was prohibited. But Caitanya would not submit to the wrongful order of prohibition. Challenging the Kazi, he led a *Samkīrtana* party patrolling through the streets of Navadvīp. No sooner did the procession reached the residence of Kazi, than Kazi took the refuge behind the bolted doors. Caitanya called Kazi to come out without fear. Kazi came out and begged pardon for his injudicious order and forthright withdrew it. This was perhaps the first act of civil disobedience in the history of India, which established Caitanya as the leading figure of Navadvīp.

Advaita Ācārya and Haridas, a sufi convert to the Vaiṣṇava faith, had been of greatest service for the propagation of Caitanya's faith. Nityānanda, another remarkable name after Caitanya, also joined this movement. After the Kazi incident, the most important step forward was the conversion of the brāhmaṇ brothers Jagāi and Mādhāi, two infamous characters who preferred to live a life

of profligacy and lawlessness. In 1509 in his twenty-fourth year Caitanya became a *sannyasin* renouncing the home-life. For the last eighteen years of his life Caitanya resided in Purī. On his way to Mathurā Caitanya met the brothers Rūpa and Sanātana for the first time. On meeting Caitanya, the two brothers gave up the service of the sultan and adopted the life of the Vaiṣṇava mendicants. Caitanya directed the brothers to go to Vṛndāvana and settled there as teachers of the faith.

Caitanya did not write much. The poem in eight stanzas in Sanskrit known among the Vaiṣṇavas as Śikṣāṣṭaka (lesson in eight verses) is practically his only writing that has come down to us. It gives us the clearest enunciation of his faith. The poem tersely but feelingly expresses the magnificence of Caitanya's faith of devotion and love. The verses read as follows—

By polishing bright, the mirror of the heart, by quenching the flame of existence, by shedding moon-beams that help the lily of salvation to blossom, by awakening to life the bride of knowledge, by making the sea of bliss swell by dispensing the drink of pure nectar at every step, and by cleansing as in a bath the entire soul, taking the name of Kṛṣṇa be ever triumphant. (1)

He has provided innumerable names for Himself, and in each of them He has vested all his powers. He has assigned no fixed time for contemplation or for taking His name. Such is Thy compassion, my God! All the same I am so hapless that I feel no inclination to take Thy name. (2)

Feeling as humble as a stalk of grass, showing more fortitude than a plant, forgetting his own importance but acknowledging the same in others, a man

should take the name of God. (3)

Neither riches nor control over men, neither a lovely wife nor poetic gift do I desire, O Lord of the universe. Only in my future births may there be pure devotion to Thee, my God. (4)

O son of Nanda, I am Thy slave tossing helplessly in the boiling sea of existence. Do Thou mercifully accept me as a speck of dust of Thy feet. (5)

My eyes would shade streams of tears, my voice would choke with emotion, my limbs would bristle in ecstatic joy: when would this happen (to me) while taking Thy name? (6)

A moment seems as long as an aeon. My eyes resemble rain-clouds. The whole world appears empty. I am separated from my God. (7)

He may hold me in close embrace or He may trample me down under His feet. He may go away from me and break my heart. The fickle Lover may do as He likes, but He alone occupies my heart. (8)

After Caitanya the acknowledged leaders of the Vaiṣṇava faith in Bengal were Advaita and Nityānanda. Advaita had influential friends and disciples, but the followers of Nityānanda were more numerous and they came from every part of Bengal. After the death of Nityānanda and Advaita, the leadership passed into the hands of Jāhnavā Devī to a large extent and to Sītā Devī to a less extent. Jāhnavā and Sītā were the junior wives of Nityānanda and Advaita. Sanātana and Rūpa after the death of Caitanya established the centre of Vaiṣṇava theology and Learning in

Vṛndāvan. The influence of Caitanya's personality and faith had reached the fringes of Assam. Śaṁkara Deva (died in 1568), who was mainly responsible for the propagation of the *Bhāgavata* Vaiṣṇavism in Kāmrūpa and Koochbehar, had met Caitanya at Purī and received inspiration from him. Caitanya brought together the people of Bengal and Odisha and also a large body of men from other parts of India who came in personal contact with him on a common platform of emancipated religious thought and spiritual emotion which gave a fillip to intellectual activity and created a new interest in life and a new literary and artistic urge.

The Śākta Poets

In a land which annually experiences the terrible as well as the benevolent aspects of nature it was inevitable that the Śākta cult should predominate. However, the Vaiṣṇava tradition is deep-rooted in Bengal as well. Floods, famines, pestilences and the depredations of wild beasts are as familiar as they are fearful to the Bengalis. Fascinated by her dread beauty, Bengalis worship Nature as Kālī and seek to appease her wrath. Goddess Kālī is imagined as a fury, a whimsical termagant, whose mad orgy of destruction who is only calmed down when Shiva, her husband and the symbol of welfare, throws himself down in her path and she inadvertently treads upon him.

Nature as goddess is the form of Śakti who can both create and destruct. She nourishes and sustains. She has multiple avatars in Bengali collective imagination. She is Durga, or Caṇḍī, the Protectress

who, by slaying the buffalo demon, saved men and gods from its ravages. She is Lakshmi, the bringer of prosperity; She is Manasā, the queen of snakes; she is Saraswati, the giver of knowledge and the arts; she is Sitala, the goddess of smallpox; she is Shasti, the bestower of many children. But always she is Sakti, Power, and the Mother. In this context, one may refer to 'Vande Mātaram', the iconic song is addressed to her literally meaning 'I adore thee, Mother!' Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the author of the song, regarded his country itself as a manifestation of the Universal Mother in the best Shakta tradition. There was at one time a rivalry between the Shiva and the Shakti cults. The popular saga of Cād Sadāgar in the Behula a legend attests to this. A legendary merchant prince named Cād Sadāgar, a devotee of Shiva, refused to bow before the goddess Manasa. In order to humble him she conspired to bring about his ruin. One by one his sons died and his treasure-laden ships were sunk. But the defiant devotee of Shiva still refused his allegiance. At last, however, he consented to worship both deities as a result of which his sons and his boats were restored to him. The ending symbolizes the synthesis between the two warring cults of Bengal.

In the villages of Bengal, the story of Behula is still performed with much enthusiasm. One may refer to two of the most popular poets Vijaya Gupta (fifteenth century) and Ketaka Dāsa (Seventeenth Century) on this subject.

The goddess as Śyāmā or Kālī has inspired many among her worshippers. Chief of them was Rāmprasād Sen (eighteenth century) whose songs

address her as the Divine Mother. Their distinctive melody and passion of devotion has made them known as 'Rāmprasādi' and they are as popular as the Kīrtans. The great saint of Bengal, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, was as fond of them as Chaitanya was of Chandidas's lyrics.

While Śyāmā has been addressed as Divine Mother, Durgā has been welcomed as daughter, who comes to visit her parents, that is, the earth for four days once a year and then returns, amidst tears, to her husband's house. These songs are sung at the time of the Durga Puja which is perhaps the biggest festival of Bengalis that has garnered the prestigious recognition of being listed as the Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO in the recent past.

As Chandi, the goddess has appeared in dreams to a host of poets. Her power and her mercy are illustrated in the tales

Just as Caṇḍī manifests herself in order to save Kālaketu and Śrīmanta so also Kālī comes to the rescue of Prince Sundar whose nocturnal philandering with his beloved Princess Vidyā is betrayed by the vermillion on his clothes. This amorous intrigue gave birth to a class of aristocratic courtly comedy. Many writers tried their hand at this but none was so successfully as Bharat Chandra Ray (eighteenth century) who was famous for all time as the author of Vidyāsāgar. His refinement, grace, precision, economy, wit and wisdom marked him out as a great master of style and compensated for a certain obscenity in his telling of the story. The character he most successfully portrayed is that of Hira Malini, the duenna. In many respects, he is surprisingly bold and modern who was ahead of his age as well. Though their cults were at once rivals there was perfect harmony between the great Shiva and his divine consort, Durga. They have always been regarded as the ideal husband and

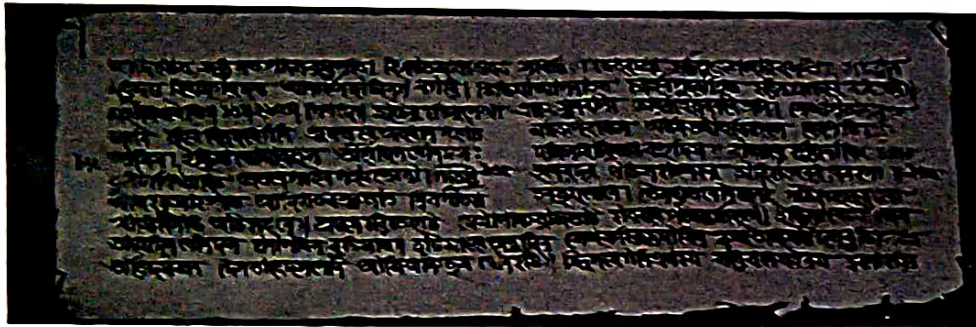
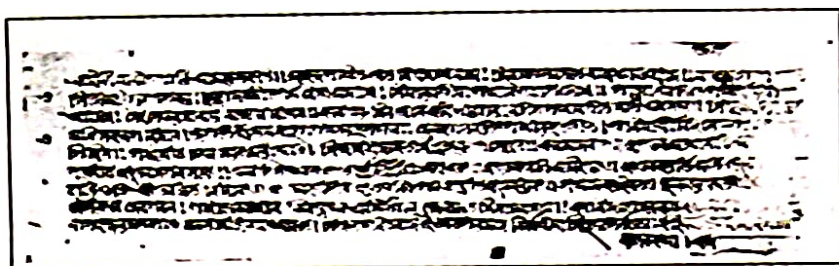


Image of a folio of a manuscript of Candimangalakavya

of Kālaketu the Hunter and Srimanta the Merchant. Kavikañkan Mukundarāma Chakravarti (sixteenth century) was unquestionably the best writer on this subject. His widely popular characters are alive to this day in rural Bengal. Bhāru Dutta, the hanger-on, and Durbala, the maidservant, are among the immortals of all fiction.

wife and theirs was an ideal household to a middleclass Bengali. Among those who have written of Shiva, the name of Rāmeśvar (eighteenth century) is noteworthy. But the Shiva stories are little read. However, at the Charak festival in March songs about Shiva are sung which are called 'Gajan.' These songs belong to the category of folk literature.

Image of a folio
of a manuscript of
Manasāvijaya



The *Maṅgal Kāvya*s relating the stories of Cād Sadāgar and Śrīmanta the Merchant who were successful businessmen with the countries outside India point out the maritime business history of the Bengali merchants. This interestingly refers to the maritime business credential of the Bengalis that Ptolemy mentions in his book. The century BC text of Ptolemy referring to the dominance of the Bengali merchants

damaging the business opportunities of the Romans clearly establish the presence of a sophisticated business culture among the Bengalis during 5th century BC. It must be mentioned that such stories were part of the oral tradition before they were written down by the poets of *Manasā Maṅgal*. This maritime exploit of the Bengalis still persists in the memory of the Bengalis. Again, the ritual of preparing raft from banana trees and placing corns and other food items as commodities during the Laxmi Puja clearly take us back to the maritime business tradition of ancient period of the Bengalis. If we study the proverbs and sayings such as, "Kori diye kinlam" which are still prevalent among the Bengalis the ancient maritime history of Bengal is further solidified. "Kori" which means the equivalent of money was the means of exchange. Therefore, the prevalence of such proverb's points to the ancient maritime history of the Bengalis. Such religio-cultural and literary expression of

the maritime history of the Bengalis in the form of literature and oral tradition and the mention of their maritime business exploits in texts of Ptolemy clearly point out the ancient origin of the Bengali language and establish the claim of classical status of Bengali language.

The Buddhist and the Muslim Poets

When Buddhism flourished the Bengali language was in its infancy.

Bengali literature can almost be said to have risen from the ashes of Buddhism. Its vestiges may be classed under three heads: (1) Folk-tales and songs, proverbs and sayings, (2) Poetic legends associated with the second principle of the Buddhist trinity, Dharma, which came to be worshipped in place of Buddha, and (3) Ballads and stories associated with a semi-Buddhist cult of which Minanath and Gorakshanath were the principal figures.

Ramai Pandit (eleventh or twelfth century) was the author of *Sunya Puran*, a treatise on latter-day Buddhism, popularly known as Dharma Puja. Incidentally this text was a document of its time. Those who followed Ramai Pandit were farther removed from the Buddhist tradition and learning. Their books had the general title, *Dharma Mangal*. They were written in the conventional 'Mangal' manner. Like the *Chandi Mangal* and the *Manasa Mangal* they were designed to demonstrate the power of Dharma and helped his worshippers through difficulties and dangers to happy endings. The authors were mostly Hindus of the respectable castes, though Ramai Pandit was an untouchable or degraded Brahman.

Among these *Dharma Mangal* writers, Ghanaram (seventeenth century) and Sahadev (eighteenth century) are the best known. Ghanaram's hero is Prince Lausen, an invincible warrior whom Dharma favours at every step in his glorious career. Lausen and his enemy Ichhai Ghosh may possibly have been historical figures of the Buddhist period. Sahadev concerns himself with the saints Minanath and Gorakshanath among others. They were the founders of the Nath sect. The members formed a separate caste of their own and are known as the 'Naths' or 'Yogis'. Most of them are weavers but some of them have taken to professions and trades. Minanath and Gorakshanath preached in the tenth or the eleventh century. Their religion was the result of a blend of Buddhism and Shiva worship. Probably it originated in the Punjab or the United Provinces, but in Bengal it got mixed up with local traditions and legends.

Many are the books entitled *Goraksha Vijay* which depicts the dilemma of the saint's temptations and conquests. Another saint of the same period was known as Hadipa, from his Hadi origin. The Hadis were and are an "untouchable" caste. This saint was the guru of Queen Maynamati. Believing that her son Gopichandra would die a premature death unless he lived apart from his wife for twelve long years, Queen Maynamati drove the unfortunate prince into exile. The leave-taking of the young man from his bride, and the sorrows of the newly-wedded couple, separated by the decree of the Queen, found poignant expression in the ballads named after either Maynamati or Gopichandra.

These ballads were popular even outside Bengal. For example, in Orissa they are sung in the Oriya language. The ballads were sung by wandering minstrels known as 'Yogis' to the accompaniment of the 'kendra', a simple curved instrument of one or two strings, played with a bow. Previous to the modern period, no provincial consciousness existed. Like the heroes and heroines of our common mythology, of our ballads and folklore are often common to several parts of India. It is because the ballad singers wandered freely across borders taking their songs and legends with them. Therefore, it becomes almost impossible to trace the original home of the characters from these songs. Hence, it is wise to take them as our common Indian heritage.

The Bengali Muslim poets also were free from any form of provincialism and sectarian bias as well. Some wrote Vaishnava poetry, some Shakta and some even 'Goraksha Vijay' poems. The two greatest names are Daulat Kazi and Alawal. Both of them lived in the seventeenth century and were attached to the Buddhist court of Roshang which has since been identified with Arakan (now in Burma). Their patron was a minister by the name of Magan Thakur who, in spite of his Hindu appellation, was a Muslim. Thus, it is interesting to note that once Bengali poetry was patronized by an Arakanese Buddhist king outside Bengal through his Bengali Muslim Minister with a Hindu name.

Daulat Kazi died young. His masterpiece, *Sati Mayna*, was left unfinished which had an interesting story to celebrate. The titular character Mayna was the faithful wife of Prince Lor.

However, he caused her much suffering by cheating on Mayna with the Princess Chandrani, a married woman whose husband was a eunuch. Daulat Kazi had a pleasing style and mastery over felicitous phrase. Therefore, it is no surprise that his epigrams survived in the speech of the people of the Chittagong District of the present-day Bangladesh where his apt sayings are quoted as proverbs to this day.

Though Daulat was a born poet and Alawal was not, the latter is the greater of the two. His works were mostly translations or adaptations but they did not lack the skilled touch of an excellent poet. Alawal knew Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi and other languages. Again, he was thoroughly acquainted with astrology, Ayurveda, Hindu rites and rituals, and the Vaishnava doctrine of love. He was a wise and enlightened man who observed much and experienced more.

His masterpiece is Padmavati. It is a translation of Malik Muhammad Jaisi's famous Hindi poem Padmavat, whose heroine is Queen Padmini of Chitor. His translation is literal only in places, for he gives his imagination ample scope as well. Alawal is in the best representative poet of the tradition of Indian poetry. His taste, terseness, dignity and wisdom make him an outstanding pillar of Bengali literature. Interestingly, though he wrote in the standard Bengali his works were found in Persian script and had to be transcribed to be accessed. This might suggest that a sort of 'Bengali Urdu' was beginning to develop but could not sustain itself. Curiously enough, many romances and theological works in the Bengali script have been written in a language so highly Persianized that only those, especially

Mussalmans, who have been well-versed in Persian can understand them. In is also interesting to note that some of such works have Hindu heroes and heroines while others have Muslim heroes who marry Hindu wives without making any attempt to convert them. One reason for this could be that perhaps the knights and ladies of the past had no patience or special affinities with the priests.

Apart from fairy tales from the Arabian Nights, another extremely crucial theme that has hugely inspired our Bengali Muslim poets is the immortal story of Imam Hossain's death on the field at Karbala. Muhammad Khan (seventeenth century) is one of the best writers on this subject. There was a time when, at the annual commemoration of the tragedy, called the Moharram, Hindus took part in the procession equally with the Mussalmans, joining in the 'Lathi' play and mock fighting with a deeply religious spirit.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, The *Mahābhārata* and the Caitanya Chronicles

Like the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have built up and sustained this province with the ancient wisdom of Aryavarta. Although only a handful of learned people knew the language of the original Sanskrit, millions were aware of the fate of the virtuous Sita, the war that was waged for her recovery, the fall of the mighty Ravana and the heroic exploits of Rama, Lakshman and Hanuman. Equally famous is the saga of Princess Draupadi who was publicly insulted in the court of the Kurus and the consequent shame that it brought on her five husbands, the

Pandu Princes. As a result, the gigantic battle of Kurukshetra took place that ultimately destroyed both armies.

It goes without saying that the effect of these two classic epics on the inner lives of Indians has been colossal. Although initially people were content with Sanskrit, gradually with the change of rulers, Muslim nobles started expressing their desire to have the poems read in their courts. But they did not really want to undertake the trouble to learn Sanskrit to enjoy the poems. Therefore, as solution, Bengali translations started enjoying patronage. It is important to note that such attempts were opposed by the Brahman priests as they wanted to retain their monopoly over the Sanskrit texts.

Just like the clergy frowned on the translations of the Bible, the Brahmins too frowned upon the translation of their sacred books and opening it to the common people to read and enjoy on their own. They feared it would undermine their authority. Their apprehension was not wrong. As the translations started coming into being, the movement inaugurated by Chaitanya galvanized Bengal. Comparison can be made with the Lutheran Movement that agitated Germany. Chaitanya was a deeply anti-caste phenomenon. Himself a vastly learned Brahmin, he embraced all who devoted themselves to Krishna and were kind to living things. His charisma was such that even those who were thirsty for his blood ended up becoming his disciples. Moved by his anti-caste teachings, everyone could be now called Vaishnavas, and gain access to the scriptures, either in the original Sanskrit or in translations. It is interesting

to note that although Bengali was held in contempt as a vulgar tongue by the pundits of that time, there was no persecution as Muslim *rulers were not* overly partial to the Brahmins. However, there was social ostracism. To this day there is a saying:

Krittibas, Kasidas, and the Pseudo-Brahmins,

Ruinous have been these three.

Perhaps they were "ruinous" to those who wanted to maintain monopoly over Sanskrit. This takes us to the popular figure Krittibas Ojha, the first and foremost of the Bengali Ramayana writers, and to Kasiram Das (seventeenth century) the foremost, but not the first, composer of a Bengali Mahabharata. They were not mere translators. Through their rich oeuvre, they documented contemporary society and ethos. Also, interestingly, ancient heroes and heroines became Bengalis in their hands.

However, little is known about these two masters who have a gap of two centuries between them. Whereas Krittibas was patronized by a Hindu king whose identity is a matter of conjecture, Kasiram Das was a man of means who did not really need patronage to carry forward his work. Kasiram's style was comparatively more modern and sophisticated. But Krittibas is said to be credited with laying the foundation of Bengali narrative verse. He was the trailblazing figure of Bengali literature and deserves all the praise for that.

In that pre-print era, many other Ramayana writers were to be found as well in the Eastern and Western Bengal. Such diversity may be due to

the effect of regionalism even within the same linguistic area. For example, there is another poet named Chandravati (sixteenth century) from Mymensingh District in Eastern Bengal, who composed a Ramayana as well. Chandravati had a pathetic life of her own which is full of betrayal, sorrows and struggles. All of it found poignant expression in the form of a ballad, an honour unique in our literature. She again poured her heart into the tragic story of Sita and gave this clichéd story a unique feminine/feminist touch.

Coming back to Krittibas, he gained such wide range of popularity across provinces when some European missionaries published his Ramayana in the nineteenth century. Among Mahabharata makers Sanjaya (fifteenth century) is the earliest known. The poem had been translated earlier for Nasrat Shah, a Muslim ruler, but the work is lost. Sanjaya's composition became the working model for subsequent authors. Another important version of Mahabharata is the one named after Paragal Khan, a Muslim general, which was by Kavindra Parameswar (sixteenth century). In the same century Chhuti Khan, the son of Paragal Khan, sponsored yet another Mahabharata by Srikanan Nandi.

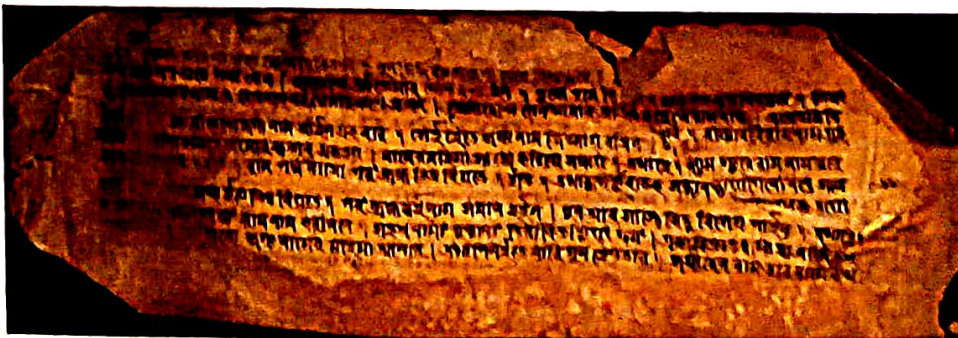
The Bhagavata, the story of the incarnations of Vishnu, was translated into Bengali also. The followers of Chaitanya who saw in him a divine incarnation was delighted when one of them, Brindabandas (sixteenth century) came out with a Chaitanya Bhagavata. It was a life of the saint written in imitation of the life of Krishna. The book depicts the contemporary time and therefore, is historically significant. Another life of the saint, Chaitanya Charitamrita, by Krishnadas Kaviraj (sixteenth century) is one of the classics of Bengali literature which was written by an intellectual as a devotee. His presentation glorified the Vaishnava view of life.

Folk Literature

. Before we proceed in our discussion of the folk literature, let us remember that folk literature is mostly transmitted orally and their origination must be traced back to older times when the community was hunter-gatherer and settling down as agricultural community. The oral literatures give us a glimpse of the worldly wisdom of an agricultural community dependent on natural forces. This wisdom is expressed in the linguistic repertoire of an agricultural community. When we look at Bengal, we

realize that it has got a vast amount of folk literature as opposed to "literature proper". It is because Bengal has been home to the the boatman, the fisherman, the snake-charmer, the elephant-trapper, the gypsies, the mendicants and so on and each of these communities have their

Image of a folio of a manuscript of Chaitanya Charitamrita



characteristic songs or incantations which are rich, and they attest to the indigenous wisdom and ways of life of this diverse community. Again, the peasants, the common householders and women from such a community have their own agricultural, mundane yet graceful lores to celebrate their lifeworld(s). Then there are the folk-tales common to all classes, castes and occupations as well.

These forms of folk literature existed much before they are written down. The vogue of oral/folk literature among the Bengalis thereby establishes the ancestry of Bengali language and substantiate the claim of its classical status.

We have already talked about the ballads of Queen Maynamati and her son Gopichandra which cut across provincial frontiers. Then there are of the famous 'Vachans' or aphorisms attributed to Dak and to Khana. Dak may have been an experienced man of the world with the gift of pointing a moral in a few forceful lines of verse or the name may have been a pseudonym for many anonymous moralists who thus left on record their practical wisdom. Here is a typical 'Daker Vachan':

Whenever I get something good,
I don't wait for the morrow to enjoy it
Making the most of milk and curds,
I avert illness with medicine.
Of what use is this world
to me, says Dak, If I die?

Khana's identity and gender is untraceable. (S)he had an unrivalled knowledge of agriculture for which (s) he is till date remembered with great reverence by the laboring peasants. Here is a specimen:

Paddy thrives in sunlight, betel in shade,

So said Khana as (s)he passed.

This kind of aphorism must be at least a thousand years old and express the time-worn truths of a time long gone.

If these 'Vachans' have been helpful to the grown-up, the children also did not remain un-entertained.

'Charās' have delighted the children. These are nursery rhymes and fables in verse, some of which are very old, while others are obviously recent. Many a times, authorship is not known of these 'vachans'.

One may assume that many of these are written by women which have been improvised to amuse and lull a crying baby. More than making sense, these are full of word pictures and sooth the ears. Some of the most important themes of such verses are the unhappy state of life a young daughter-in-law is stuck in, or the longing with which girls cherish comparatively happy childhood memories. Evidently, such rhymes reveal a lot of insights into the contemporary social order and women's condition within it. The crucial aspects of war and famine have also left their impression upon these innocent

পূর্ববঙ্গ-গীতিকা

[দ্বিতীয় খণ্ড, দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যা, ১৯২৪-২৬]

দ্বিতীয় খণ্ড, দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যা

কলিকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের দপ্তর, বঙ্গদেশের অধ্যাপক এবং প্রবন্ধ
পত্রিকার ও "সমস্যা" ও "সাহিত্য", "গোপালী কবী", "পল্লবি"
এবং বঙ্গদেশী লায়নসেস এন্ড নিউজপেপার প্রচারিত
বিশ্ব বাঙ্গালী ও ইংল্যান্ড প্রবন্ধ

ব্রাহ্ম বাহাদুর শ্রীদীনেশচন্দ্র সেন, বি.এ., ডি. লিট.,

কর্তৃক সম্পাদিত



১৯২৪-২৬

কলিকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় কর্তৃক প্রকাশিত
১৯২৬

Purvavaṅga-Gītikā,
folk music in EAST
Bengal collected by
Dineshchandra Sen

doggerels. These Chaṛās are impossible to translate for they rely upon rhyme, rhythm and assonance for their effects which would be lost in translation, if attempted. Here, however, is an amusing one:

Mother, dear Mother, your son-in-law has come.

He has gone to bathe with a kochu leaf on his head!

I gave him oil to massage himself; he threw it away!

I gave him a knife to cut sugarcane, he cut his nose!

I gave him water to wash his feet and he drank it!

I gave him a piri to sit upon and he has lain down upon it!

In this context, it is noteworthy that a very credible collection of the folk-tales of Bengal has been assembled by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar. As they were meant for children, the most frequent themes of such verses dealt with the theme of evil versus good, and the consequent victory of the good over the evil:

Now my tale is done,
The amaranth has shut its leaves.

Why have you shut your leaves?

Why do the cows eat them?

Why do you eat them, cows?

Why doesn't the cowherd take us to pasture?

Cowherd, why don't you take the cows to pasture?

And so on. Logically, one may infer that the age of these tales must be as old as the race itself, out of which they emerged. Of late, some of these tales found themselves in other provinces with minor variations. Named after their heroines, 'Puspmala',

'Sankhamala', 'Kanchanmala', 'Madhumala', and 'Malanchamala' these are relics of the Buddhist period and mention seafaring. The heroes are often merchants who travel abroad, leaving their young wives at home, and are destined to face trials and tribulations. Often, they celebrate stories of faithful women proving their loyalty to their husbands and rescue them from unpredictable turn of events. They also celebrate women in adventurous missions and interestingly, there is no trace of purdah or veiling. Hindu women have a separate set of didactic tales known as the 'Bratakatha' with a religious-moral tone. These tales are associated with ceremonies performed by Hindu women. The stories are read on certain fast days or days marking the taking or completion of a vow. Some such tales are of Buddhist origin with Brahmanic interpolations and adaptations. As literature, the merit of these old tales lies in the manner of their recital.

However, talking about the contribution of women to Bengali literature, it is not confined to folk-tales only. Women tried their hands at ballads as well. Chandravati, of whose Ramayana we have already been spoken about, was also the author of some of the ballads which were still popular in the district of Mymensingh. Despite their somewhat distorted forms at present, these ballads are the marvels of Bengali Literature. These ballads deal with realistic portrayal of raw human emotions, passions, and vulnerabilities against a background of contemporary social repression. And, interestingly, no divine intervention is introduced at the critical juncture to preserve such heroes and heroines from their fate. Tragically enough, they

face death and disgrace squarely by themselves championing the human endeavor to struggle for existence.

But due to the limited circulation of the ballads, the chief entertainment of the people was the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Because of this problem of circulation, the province as a whole remained ignorant of such gems like the ballads, the Baul songs, the Bhawaia melodies and the Raibese dances.

Interestingly, the Bauls, or 'Fools of God', are an esoteric sect cutting across both Hindu and Muslim communities. They are mostly illiterate (in the conventional sense of the term "literate") souls innocent both of the Koran and the Puranas. Beyond institutionalized religions, they rely on their own conscience and innate spiritual insight to navigate through the maze of this world. To them God and humans are the eternal lovers who coalesce in the human body. The Baul philosophy asks what is the need to go to Benares or Mecca on pilgrimage when in your own self is the ultimate abode of the Lord. In one of his plays Rabindranath Tagore portrays a blind Baul who was enlightened enough to traverse through the mysteries of life and death and enjoy everlasting youth. Tagore himself acted the role. Baul poetry is full of gems. Here is one:

Who is this goldsmith that has come to
the lotus pool?

He tests the lotus with his touchstone!
O dear, O dear?

The suggestiveness and the simplicity
of these two lines are characteristic of the
Bauls.

The Bhawaias who were once extremely

popular both in the villages and the cities,
are not a sect, but a class of professional
singers. They entertain the country-folk
with their light-hearted, humorous ditties,
somewhat coarse and ribald, but lively,
vigorous and true to life. They sing in
Eastern Bengal dialects and take part in
musical tournaments. The Kabiwalas or
'Meistersingers' of Bengal used to fight
wordy duels of which the arsenals were
the Mahabharata, The Ramayana, and the
Bhagavata. It is astonishing to discover a
Portuguese among them.

Bharat Chandra Ray wrote his
Vidyasundar, the last landmark of the
old Bengali literature, a few years
before the battle of Plassey (1757) and
Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote his
Meghnad Badh, the first landmark of
the new literature, a few years after
the Sepoy Mutiny (1857). The hundred
years between these two classic texts
were a period of great transition. In the
meantime, the English merchants of
Calcutta took over the administration of
the province and subjugated the whole
of Hindustan. A change of rulers was no
new thing in India's history but this time
the political change was accompanied
by unprecedented social, economic and
cultural changes of immense significance.
In the wake of such sea change in the
fate of Bengal as well, towns assumed an
importance they had never witnessed in
the past. As a result, all the wealth and
intelligence of Bengal were gravitated
to Calcutta. As a result of such grand
scale colonial adventure, railways,
steamers and post offices reached out
to the remotest of interior spaces of
Bengal and the printing press multiplied
the proliferation of written words by
a thousand-fold. The wealthier youth

were brought up in the new schools and colleges and were exposed to English literature.

As one of the consequences of such unprecedented change, on the sky of Bengali literature, the genre of prose emerged, something that did not really exist before. The European missionaries, by translating The Bible and writing Christian tracts, did some pioneering work in this line. Their protégé, Ram Bose, wrote the first important book of prose, the *Pratapaditya Charit* or Life of *Pratapaditya*. The titular character was a Bengali Prince who fought for independence from the Mughals. This was published in 1801. After this, Bengali prose kick-started its journey with full swing. In the hands of Raja Ram Mohan Ray, a quarter of a century later, it became a powerful instrument of social and religious reform. The next considerable writer was Akshay Kumar Datta who was known for his excellent scientific and philosophical articles. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar added a literary flavor to their prose style and prepared the way for Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

Alongside prose, Bengali poetry too kept enriching itself due to Western influence that revolutionized its taste. Iswar Chandra Gupta was famous for his satires. Around this time, the appearance of Michael Madhusudan Dutt catered to the want for something grand and noble and virile -something Homeric or Miltonic.

A third important phenomenon was the rise of Bengali drama. Dramatic performances had not been unknown to Bengal. "Jatras," or open-air performances by strolling players on Puranic

themes were a happy combination of entertainment and education. However, with the growth of cities requirement from a more learned audience arose for fixed stages, designated buildings for use as theatres and players capable of satisfying a more sophisticated taste. Both Sanskrit and English plays were produced in Bengali versions. Social reform was in the air and Ram Narayan wrote a preachy play entitled *Kulinakula Sarvaswa* condemning polygamy. The play was a huge hit and as a result, polygamy received a mortal blow. Afterwards, the abled hands of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Dinabandhu Mitra were enough to galvanize Bengali theatre. Mitra soon made his debut with his famous *Nil Darpan*. The technique of these dramas was predominantly English though their framework was Sanskritic and themes were patriotic. The Jatra tradition lingered as an undercurrent. Nonetheless, the Calcutta stage in its turn influenced the country side Jatras. Nowadays the Jatras are imitating the theatre in methods of production in order to attract crowd. However, the Calcutta stage, in spite of modern technical advance, still remains Jatra-like at the core.

Due to the influence of British colonialism, Bengali prose, poetry and drama, all reflected the impact of a strange civilization which had little in common with our own and its scientific and humanistic aspects made a strong impression to Bengalis who accepted them as gifts of Providence. However, they vehemently opposed any proselytizing attempts by the Christian missionaries. The Brahmo Samaj movement of Raja Ram Mohan Ray however tried to maintain a balanced attitude. But the

ordinary reaction, mostly, was either complete Anglicization or an intensified conservatism. On the one hand, many intellectuals became Christians, on the other, a good many otherwise sensible men tried to intensely resist any manner of change: from the abolition of sati to the introduction of English education and surgery with its attendant dissection.

As hinted earlier, the domain of the literary saw an unprecedented amount of proliferation of prose. The two best magazines were the *Tatwabodhini Patrika* edited by Akshay Kumar Datta and the *Vividhartha Sangraha* edited by Rajendralala Mitra, both of them avoided didactic tone and were informative in nature. They established standards which are still considered high.

One of the outstanding newspapers of this time was the *Prabhakar*, edited by Iswar Chandra Gupta. It was at first a weekly then a daily, and was read more for its verses and its literary appeal than for its news. The zeal of the neo-Bengali writers also found expression in an amazing variety of translations from English and Sanskrit. It consisted an exhaustive range of text-books, encyclopedias, treatises on medicine, mechanics, chemistry, phonetics and all manner of subjects. Bengalis used this critical juncture of time and technology to salvage, beautify and create as much of literary-cultural products as they could to commemorate their ancient culture and literature. This particular period, in that sense, paved the way for the generations to come who were to take care of the more experimental and creative aspect of such a grand literary-cultural project.

Vidyasagar and Michael Madhusudan Dutta

The old traditions of our literature were turned topsy-turvy with the advent of the figures like Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). The scion of an aristocratic Hindu family, he ran away as a boy and became a Christian. He distinguished himself as an Indo-English poet.

After he returned to Bengal from South India, he persuaded himself to write in Bengali. At first, he felt alien to the Bengali language, but eventually returned to his mother tongue and explored it with his loving touch and exotic melodies, hitherto undreamt of in the language. And the language too rewarded him with much success and popularity.

Michael's ambition was to write an epic. His first attempt was *Tilottama Sambhava*, based on the mythological story of the perfectly beautiful woman, created to be an apple of discord. This book made his reputation but there was uproar over its blank verse, an unheard-of innovation in Bengali literature. But Michael hushed all controversies by his second epic, *Meghnad Badh*, which was hailed as a work of enduring greatness. Its theme was taken from The Ramayana. Meghnad, the heroic son of Ravana, fell in battle and his no less heroic wife, Pramila, destroyed herself on his funeral pyre.

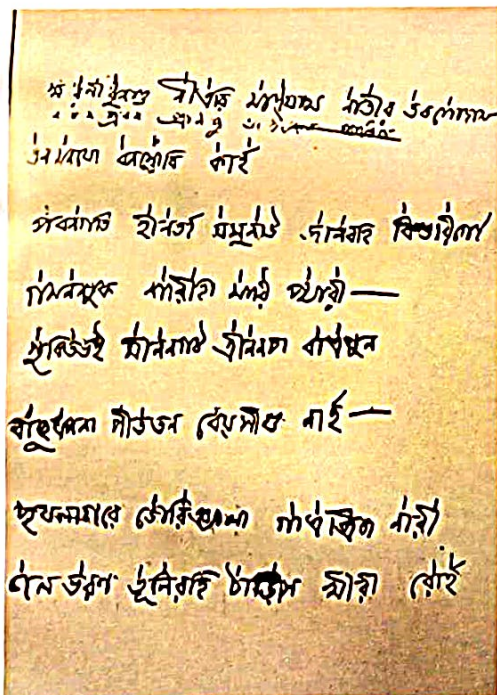
In *Virangana Kavya* Michael composed a series of imaginary epistles in blank verse, each of them addressed by a mythological lady to her lord or lover. They are in the best tradition of chivalry.

Michael explored the theme of heroism

through all his works but the true greatness of his works lies in the fact that he moved beyond the conventional modes of abiding by who was evil and who was divine. He very creatively deconstructed idea of heroic virtues in men and women. Although his verse is not known for great humor or wit, his plays were exception to this. His best-known play is, however, a tragedy woven around the Rajput princess, Krishna Kumari.

Another excellent contribution by Dutt was his sonnets which were modeled after Petrarch. His deep love for his country and his pride in the immortal characters of Sanskrit and Bengali literary tradition were some important themes that he celebrated in his sonnets. Again, he paid tribute through them to Italy, Versailles, Dante, Victor Hugo, Tennyson and many others through these sonnets.

Handwritten musical notation by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

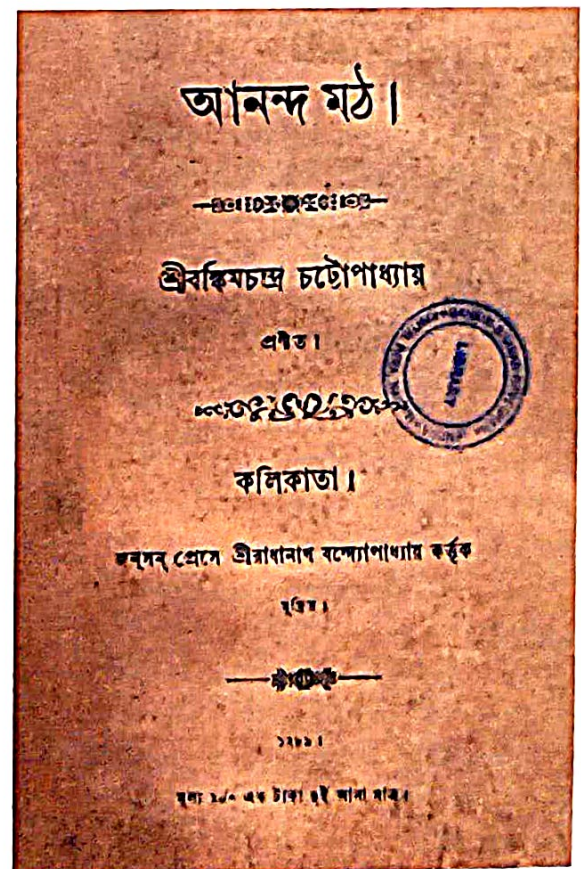


Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1893), a member of the Provincial Civil Service was another crucial figure in Bengali literature who contributed a

lot. Like Michael, he began to write first in English, but quickly discovered his true medium i.e., his mother tongue Bengali. He wrote successively hit novels on the one hand, and on the other, began editing a literary periodical named Banga Darshan through which he formed and guided the critical taste of his times. His essays were witty and his style, at

its best, was a model of compression and clarity.

As subjects of his novels Bankim chose historical themes mostly. As he was deeply disturbed by his motherland's subjugation at the hands of British imperialism, he attempted to reconstruct India's national past. By doing that he strove to revive national pride and self-respect and preached national regeneration through religious revival. The religion he advocated was essentially a blend of the Gita with Western positivism. His later novels became his pulpit. That was the heyday of the Bengali cult religious figure Ramakrishna Paramhansa. In the wake of Ramakrishna, Bankim and the Brahmo Samaj was not taken seriously. But his ardent nationalism set the hearts of his



Title page of Ananda math by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

countrypeople on fire. The agitation over the partition of Bengal which was known as the 'Swadeshi Movement' was the flaring up of the flame he and his contemporaries had kindled. His 'Bande Mataram' (Hail to the Motherland!) has become the iconic song that celebrates Indian nationalism. The song manifests the distilled essence of his brand of patriotism.

But Bankim Chandra was no less great as an artist than as a nationalist. His characters despite being imaginary were lively enough to rekindle the passions of tens of thousands of Indians. The historical novels cover almost the entire Mohammedan period. *Mrinalini* gives a vivid picture of Bengal betrayed by her Quislings to the early Muslim invaders. *Durgeshnandini* and *Kapalkundala* have for the setting Bengal in Akbar's time. Rajsingh takes us to Rajput Chivalry in the days of Aurangzeb and Sitaram brings us back to Bengal under the Nawabs of Murshidabad when Hindu chieftains were becoming rebellious. In *Chandrasekhar*, *Devichaudhurani* and *Anandamath*, all placed in the unsettled period when the Mohammedan regime was giving place to the British, Bankim introduces some white servants of the East India Company. His anti-muslim bias gradually merges into a feeling of resentment against the English. But he admired their bravery as he had acknowledged many fine Mughal qualities.

His social novels critique the contemporary Bengal society. In both *Bishbriksha* (the Poison Tree) and *Krishnakanter Will* (Krishnakanta's Will), he deals with the topic of widow-marriage. His other plays are *Rajani*,

Radharani and *Indira* which have happy endings. Among these plays probably *Indira* was his own favourite as it deals with the fate of abducted girls who, for no fault of their own, are automatically discarded by their families.

Though he had an innate social conservatism and did not agree with reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Ray and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra was a radical thinker in his own right and one of the finest minds of his time. In his essays in particular he analyzed important topics such as the problems of national independence and even socialism.

The Contemporaries of Michael and Bankim

Like his friend, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Dinabandhu Mitra served his literary apprenticeship under the poet Iswar Chandra Gupta, editor of the *Prabhakar*. A born humorist, he wrote hugely successful comedies, but the play by which he is best known has a tragic ending. *Nil Darpan*, one of his best creations, mirrored the oppressive nature of the indigo planters towards the indigenous peasant community. Interestingly, for translating this play into English Michael Madhusudan Dutt is said to have lost his job and for publishing the English version a benevolent missionary, Reverend Mr. James Long, was imprisoned. *Nil Darpan* was translated into several European languages and created a massive and unprecedented amount of uproar. However, the wrongs which the play exposed were redressed in Bengal but lingered on in Bihar until Mahatma Gandhi offered Satyagraha on

the issue.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, a popular actor and stage manager was another favorite figure of the Bengali literary-cultural tradition whom the admirers used to call the Garrick of Bengal. Having a professional group of actors and actresses dependent upon him for their nightly employment he had to fall back on his own talent as a playwright for material. He wrote and produced a vast number of plays, some original and others were basically taken from various sources, for example, Hindu mythology and Indian history. Girish even laid hands on Shakespeare. After Girish the authors who most enriched Bengali literature was Amritlal Bose and Kshirode Prasad Vidyavinod.

In poetry the epic had become a craze and *Meghnad Badh* catered to this taste. *Meghnad Badh* was followed by all manner of badhs, which meant slaughter. Another important of this tradition was *Vritra Samhar* (the slaying of Vritra), written by Hem Chandra Banerjee

This patriotic enthusiasm further crystallized in the epic poems of Nabin

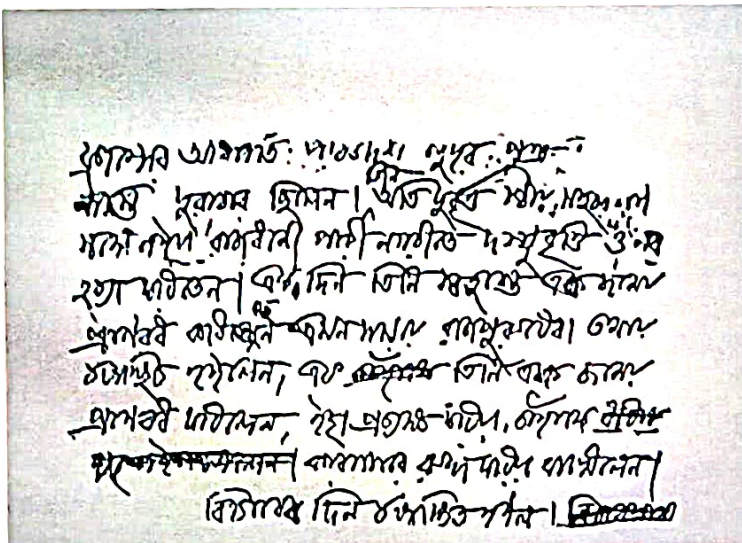
Chandra Sen, a member of the Provincial Civil Service, whose *Palashir Juddha* (The Battle of Plassey) lamented the defeat of the last independent ruler of Bengal.. Just like Bankim, in his other epics Nabin Chandra reverted to mythological subjects and pinned his hope of a national regeneration through religious revivalism.

Rangalal Banerjee, another eminent poet, derived his inspiration from the annals of Rajput chivalry. 'Who wants to live without freedom? Who wants to live?' was his impassioned war cry. Young men in Bengal were wearying of Anglicized ways as they realized more and more that they had no freedom in their own country. 'In thy native land thou art an exile!' exclaimed another poet, Govinda Chandra Ray. 'After how long, O India, this ocean of misery wilt thou cross?'

At this critical historical juncture Bengal witnessed a group of young, intellectual and talented artists who gradually became disillusioned with Western civilization and turned towards doing their bit to free their beloved country from the colonizers through art and literature. For example, Toru Dutt, an Indo-English poet of Bengal, idealized the Indian past in her Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. If she loved France above all other countries, it was because France was the land of liberty. If she had not died a pre-mature death at the age of only twenty-one, she might have been one of the great figures of Bengali Literature like her fellow Christian, Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

When it comes to Bengali prose, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the radical social reformer, also exerted a powerful influence. His diction was highly

Handwritten Story
manuscript of Iswar
Chandra Vidyasagar



Sanskritic, after the manner of Mrityunjay Tarkalankar and other pioneers, but the clarity of his mind shone through his rhetoric. Bhudev Mukherjee whose prose style was simpler than Vidyasagar, may be grouped together as belonging to the Vidyasagar school. However, Vidyasagar was an agnostic and a champion of radical change, whereas Bhudev had an unmovable faith almost bordering on dogmatism.

There are other figures too who contributed their bits in the development of Bengali literature. One such person was Romesh Chunder Dutt. He was a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service who was destined to become a President of the Indian National Congress. He resembled Bankim in his prose style and to Vidyasagar in his social thought. His historical tales are still popular though his social novels have dated. Taraknath Ganguli was the author of a memorable story called *Swarnalata*. Sanjib Chandra Chatterjee, brother of Bankim Chandra, was also a gifted writer of fiction. Then there was Trailokyanath Mukherjee who remembered for an evergreen children's tale named *Kankavati*.

Prose was further simplified by the great Brahmo evangelist, Keshub Chander Sen. He started *Sulabh Samachar*, a newspaper intended for the masses. However, it was ahead of its time and unfortunately, could not please the masses despite its simpler prose style. In the early part of twentieth century another attempt was made by an ardent patriot, Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay whose newspaper, *Sandhya* fortunately catered to the taste of the common

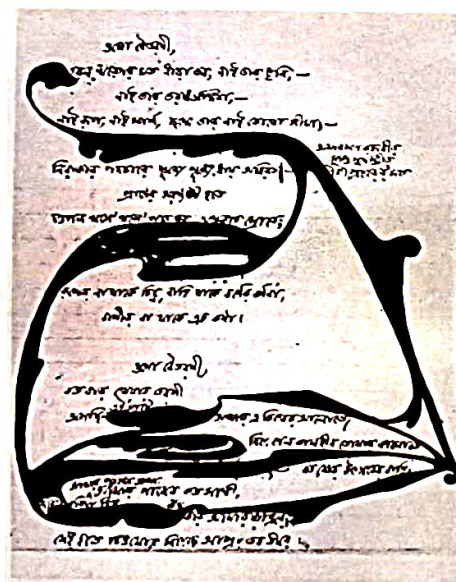
people. But the masses were not kind to Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Pachar Naksha* (The Sketches of Hutom the Owl) as well which remained neglected. It was written in a natural, easy style without sacrificing literary standards. Its humour recalls that of *Alaler Gharer Dulal* by Tekchand, one of the masterpieces of the transition period and milestones of Bengali prose.

Another important name is that of Mir Musharraf Hussain whose *Bishad Sindhu* (Ocean of Sorrow) remains the best Bengali prose work on the ever-popular theme of the Karbala tragedy. His writing is powerful and dramatic.

Rabindranath Tagore

The Tagores were already an illustrious family before the birth of Rabindranath. Their family was ostracized as Pirali Brahmans (Pirali being derived from Pir) by the orthodox groups because they had at one time been on friendly terms with Muslims and the English as well. They were a progressive cosmopolitan family. One of the first Bengalis to sail abroad was Dwarkanath Tagore, who unfortunately died in England.

Manuscript of Puravi
kavya by Rabindranath
Tagore



Devendranath Tagore, Dwarkanath's son and Rabindranath's father, in his spiritual quest, united Sufism with the

Upanishads, having a special fondness for the latter. He had Christian contacts too. It is believed that the mantle of Raja Ram Mohan Ray fell upon his shoulders. For a generation he led the Brahmo Samaj and later one of the three sections into which it split. He enjoyed great respect from across sects and was generally revered as the "maharshi" or the great sage.

He strove to unite the best thoughts of both the oriental and Western cultural and philosophical heritages. With a true cosmopolitan spirit, hobnobbed with poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, thinkers and preachers of all denominations and of all countries and embraced them all. The range was quite big including travelers from Japan, Muslim peasants from North Bengal, political leaders from Bombay and innumerable others. They patronized two Bengali Monthlies, one for adults and the other for adolescents, in addition to the periodical published by the Brahmo Samaj which he directly looked after. Younger members of the family were encouraged in amateur theatricals of their own and the leaders of Calcutta Society were invited to their performances. Women from this family were equally modern in their ways of living and they happened to be the trailblazers in different spheres, for example, in the domains of fashion and cookery. A daughter-in-law from their family set a standard of dress for women, which still prevails in Bengali and most of India. Another lady of the family wrote books on cookery.

Evidently, even without Rabindranath this extraordinary family would have left its mark on literature, painting

and religion of Bengal. The Maharshi himself was the author of a famous autobiography. *Swapna Prayan* (The Passing of a Dream) by his eldest son Dwijendranath left an impression on many. . Another son, Jyotirindranath, was a translator of Sanskrit dramas and French short stories. His extremely talented daughter, Swarna Kumari Devi was another important figure. She was the author of numerous novels, plays and poems and was also a social worker. She was the editor of the journal *Bharati*. Among other relatives Sudhindranath was distinguished for his short stories and Balendranath for the inimitable style of his essays. The great painter Abanindranath is a writer of stories for children, which are packed with imagination and fantasy.

Into this cosmopolitan and versatile family Rabindranath was born in 1861, a few years after the Mutiny when the spirit of nationalism was in the air. The Tagores of Calcutta with their broader outlook realized that national isolation and the politics of divisiveness was undesirable at this critical historical juncture... A passionate lover of India and her finest ideals, he was a true enlightened Tagore to allow himself to be monopolized by any exclusive creed. He fought all kinds of exclusionary ideology with unabated enthusiasm to the end. Himself a devout Brahmo he condemned the exclusionists in his great novel *Gora*. As a leader of the Swadeshi movement, he denounced his followers for their chauvinism, accounting for this defection in another important novel *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World).

Variety was the life of his art which he

celebrated with utmost vigor through all his works. After Bankim's death the reading public turned to Rabindranath who catered to them with a rich variety of range including essays, stories, poems, plays, reviews, notes as well as the lyrics which were already unrivalled. *Sadhana*, a periodical he edited in the nineties was filled with his writings alone. Having been home-schooled himself, he knew the importance of an alternative education system as opposed to the mainstream one which he vehemently critiqued. Therefore, he founded his residential school at Santiniketan which provided the pupils scope to grow in the lap of nature.

As someone who has felt the pangs of partition and the state of being under foreign rule, Rabindranath turned his indignation into creative channels and made plans for national education and social reconstruction. Again, he used the medium of writing to awaken self-reliance and a sense of self-respect in his fellow citizens. As the movement degenerated into bomb throwing and secret murders, disappointed Tagore returned to Santiniketan and proceeded quietly with his educational experiments.

Both his 'Swadeshi' period and the period of 'Sadhana' preceding it were most fruitful for literature.

During his 'Swadeshi' period, among his multifarious activities he produced the best of his novels, *Gora*, which is one of the greatest novels of Bengali literature.

The third great period in Rabindranath's life began when he retired himself from all sorts of active politics and was awarded the Nobel Prize for his *Gitanjali*. Other outstanding works

were *Balaka* (The Swan), *Falguni* (Cycle of Spring), and *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World). It was a period of mysticism crowned with world fame. Post winning the Nobel Prize, he started spreading the message of India and its people across the globe through innumerable lecture tours.

The succeeding period was likewise full of creative work but he largely kept himself preoccupied with the problems of humanity. left him little time for any large scale or profound literary undertaking. He also focused attention on rural reconstruction and popular science. Nonetheless, he was prolific enough to produce five or six volumes of prose and verses every year. Of the poems written during the last twenty years, the collection called *Purabi* once again took him to the zenith of his poetic and imaginative best.

Contemporaries of Rabindranath

Bengal witnessed such an unprecedented literary and imaginative excellence with Rabindranath that scholars often compare Bengal during Tagore's time with Germany during the time of Goethe. Tagore's credit lies in the fact that during his lifetime the mind of his fellow-Bengalis changed beyond recognition because of him.

Another major achievement of Rabindranath was that he could synthesize the best of both the Orient and the Occident. Such universality of outlook was extremely rare. The majority of Tagore's contemporaries derived their chief inspiration from the rising spirit of nationalism which climaxed in the Swadeshi Movement, the greatest and

most far-reaching event of the time. The Bengalis fought, single-handedly and obtained the abrogation of the partition of the province. Amidst the divisive communal politics, such collective show of unity was a commendable phenomenon. Again, in the domain of art, culture and literature, Bengalis displayed unmatched excellence and progress.

For the sake of convenience, we can group them under three heads, although a certain amount of overlapping is inevitable.

I. Poets

Dwijendralal Ray, who studied in England, was the most outstanding among the poets and dramatists. Like Bankim, he drew exhaustively on Indian History for the subjects of his plays, going as far back as Chandragupta Maurya and the legendary conquerors of Ceylon. But while Bankim desired a Hindu revival, Dwijendralal moved beyond narrow confines of communal sentiments and strove for Hindu-Muslim unity. His Mughal characters are portrayed with as much sympathy and insight as their foes, the Rajputs. Of his dramas, *Chandragupta* and *Shah Jehan* are probably two of the most successful and memorable plays. His plays celebrated strength and heroism as two supreme virtues. Like many of the thinking brains of his time, the fact that his land was under foreign rule caused him deep sadness and he did not shy away from calling out the sheer helplessness and hypocrisy of the time with poignant mockery. He is till date remembered chiefly for his mastery of the poetic form and sardonic humour.

Devendranath Sen, a romantic at heart, was a master of the sonnet that chiefly celebrated beauty and luxury.

Then there was Akshay Kumar Baral who excelled in love lyrics. These were rich in imagery, exuberant in diction but restrained in form. He was highly individual in his poetic taste.

Kamini Ray was one of the foremost women poets of this time who deserves special mention. Her best works were perhaps the poems written on the premature death of her son Asoka. In them she gives voice to both the joys of motherhood and the great sorrow that she felt as a result of the death of her son.

Priyambada Devi was another talented poet whose sweet and simple lines were full of elegant charm and grace. She wrote rarely and left only a few precious collections of her verse.

Another figure Satyendranath Datta at times even surpassed the great Rabindranath Tagore in his experiments with metres and forms. He sang of liberty and equality, extending the notion of his patriotism as love for all humankind. Besides being an excellent poet, he was a devout and skilled translator as well, and he translated some of the best poems across the globe.

Mohitlal Majumdar was a stoic who was known for his high standard of poetry. He touched upon the somber and pessimistic aspects of life and explored them in his poetry.

Jatindramohan Bagchi, Karunanidhan Banerjee, Kumud Ranjan Mullick and

Kalidas Ray are a few more noteworthy names that have made memorable contributions to the great and illustrious tradition of Bengali poetry with their patriotic and reflective lyrics. Their elegance and finish contrast sharply with the rugged lines of Jatindranath Sengupta whose irony is relieved by good humour.

As opposed to the poetry of mixed medium of Urdu and Bengali, Mozammel Huq showed considerable command of the Bengali tongue.

Govinda Chandra Das, a poet of Eastern Bengal, was noted for his freshness and vigour and attracted controversy because of his frankness. Rajani Kanta Sen was equally proficient in devotional, patriotic and humorous poetry and songs. Atul Prasad Sen, famous for his beautiful songs, was a good poet who found solace for his sorrows in music.

According to many, famous for his nonsense rhymes, Sukumar Ray was the nearest equivalent to Lewis Carroll. His nonsense rhymes, ostensibly written for children, often are covert social-political critiques too that attracted the adults equally. Kirandhan Chatterjee was another name that was skilled in light verse.

II Essayists

Coming to the list of Bengali essayists, Pramatha Choudhury, a barrister-at-law, is noteworthy who used the pen name of Birbal, the court jester of the Mughal emperor Akbar. No doubt, he was one of the finest modern Bengali writers and his essays are masterpieces of style, erudition and entertainment. His short stories are equally appealing and often

intriguing. *Char Yari Katha* is a set of four stories which is a model of good writing. Four Friends relate their love experiences to each other as they sit in their club, drinking. Every word in the stories is indispensable and adds to the verbal jugglery.

He will also be remembered for his usage of colloquial Bengali as a medium as opposed to the formal "sadhu bhasa" of the literati, which was in vogue in the early nineteenth century but had subsequently grown stilted and artificial. The *Sabuj Patra* (Green Leaf), a magazine edited by Pramatha Choudhury during the World War II, attracted some of the most gifted members of the younger Bengali intelligentsia by its cult of youth. Among its contributors his wife Indira Devi Choudhurani occupied an eminent place.

Sivanath Sastri, distinguished for his autobiography was also a biographer, novelist and poet with a pleasing manner and a light touch.

The name Ramendra Sundar Trivedi is important as an essayist because of their philosophical subjects.

Suresh Chandra Samajpati's editorials in the *Sahitya* were dictatorial but nonetheless popular among the elite class of Bengal.

The editor of *Pravāsi*, Ramananda Chatterjee labored for forty years to keep up literary standards of his contemporary time. His style is precise, measured and witty.

Hirendranath Dutta's essays on literary and

philosophical subjects reflected upon his profound learning and lively intellectual curiosity.

Jogesh Chandra Ray was another essayist who was famous for his original researches in linguistics.

Bijay Chandra Majumdar perhaps a better poet than prose writer was famous for his contribution in studying comparative languages and ethnology.

Dinesh Chandra Sen, author of a monumental history of Bengali literature, was also a popularizer of mythology and folklore with a power to move the heart.

Jaladhar Sen had the same power in a greater degree. His travelogues are the best of his works, though he was a popular novelist as well.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar is encyclopaedic in the scope of his writings which hold the interest by their vivacity and gusto.

Ajit Kumar Chakravarti died young. An authority on Rabindranath, he was also a discerning critic intimately acquainted with the mystic traditions of the East and the West.

Nalini Kanta Gupta, the right-hand man of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh is famous for his vast knowledge on classical and modern studies in many languages. He has a calm, reposeful manner of writing. His outlook was universal and modern.

Suresh Chandra Chakravarti has the unique gift of breathing poetry into prose. A considerable poet, his essays and fairy tales are evergreen as well.

Atul Chandra Gupta is a discriminating critic whose appraisal is generally sound. His erudition is matched by his power of exact expression.

Dhurjati Prasad Mukherjee is a vastly learned critic, brilliant at times and erratic at others.

Barindra Kumar Ghosh and Upendranath Banerjee, ex-revolutionaries, are popular for their memoirs in excellent prose that captured the imagination of an entire generation. Among other ex-revolutionaries who have literary powers, mention should be made of Motilal Ray, better known as a man of religion.

III Novelists

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee is a household name even in the rural villages of Bengal who mesmerized the readers with his portrayal of Bengali village life and their life-worlds. He was renowned outside Bengal as well, through translations of his novels. His works are full of passionate sympathy for the oppressed and the weak. They also are intense critiques of the contemporary village life. His women characters are particularly well-drawn. Some of his most vivid characters belong to the sub-social world and even the respectable ones for the most part reflect their author's Bohemian temperament. Some of his celebrated female characters are 'Bindu', 'Biraj', 'Rama', and other village girls, sweet and proud and misunderstood. His village scenes are unrivalled for their charm and intimacy.

The universal favorite among his

novels is *Srikanta*, named after the hero whose life it in part relates. Then there is *Grihadaha* (The Burning of a Home) which is perhaps his masterpiece. It is a story of triangle love story. The hero in love with his friend's wife, carries her away. But he is unable to win her consent to live with him. Finally, he dies a tragic death when he goes to treat a case of plague and catches the contagion.

In *Charitrahin* (The Immoralists), the most discussed of his novels, rationality is shown in conflict with conventional morality. This was one of the problems that the author tried to explore with great sincerity.

Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee was a born story-teller and was known for his simplicity and straightforwardness of prose. His works are full of both pathos and humour. Many of his stories have been translated into Hindi, Marathi and other languages.

Charu Chandra Banerjee, another craftsman of considerable repute, whose choice of words was inimitable, was at his best in short stories. Most of his characters were humble folk victimized by society or by fate. Some of his stories also have been translated.

Nirupama Devi is one of the important novelists who explored how women were treated in the contemporary social order and what their intricate relationships with each other looked like. She was well-known for her memorable novel *Didi* (the Elder Sister). The same theme of intra-women solidarity and relationship recurs in her later novels which, though few, maintain the same high standard for

fiction.

Kedarnath Banerjee is another leading humorist in prose. Like Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee, his novels and short stories are also a beautiful blend of pathos and humour.

Rajsekhar Bose, better known by his pen-name, 'Parasuram', has written a number of humorous stories which are unforgettable for the whimsical manner of their telling and the absurd characters that they tear out from life.

Suresh Chandra Banerjee has left us a masterpiece in his *Chitrabaha* that tells a tale of two countries, India and Japan. True to its title, portraits and scenes flow through it.

Naresh Chandra Sengupta, is known for the thrilling nature of his writings. He was a highly learned advocate who had a special interest in pathological, criminological and other such subjects.

Surupa Devi, known to the public as Indira Devi, was the author of some notable novels.

The tales of Anurupa Devi are extremely popular though she has a didactic bias which affects their literary value.

Saurindra Mohan Mukherjee of the same family is equally popular as a novelist. However, his literary gifts suffer as quality is compromised for quantity.

His friend Hemendra Kumar Ray has followed the same primrose path in juvenile fiction after an initial success as a

considerable short-story writer.

Another friend of his, Manilal Ganguli, was a better artist. His stories, though few, were delicately told and often uncanny.

There is another talented family group with which Sarat Chandra Chatterjee served his apprenticeship. Surendranath Ganguli is noted for his fascinating story *Bairag Yoga*. Upendranath Ganguli was gifted with the rare craft of humour, wit and power to sustain interest of the reader.

Sailabala Ghosh has written some remarkable tales which reflect a rare virtue in her as a story-teller and that is the ability to remain free from prejudices. Her works display a genuine empathy for Muslims. Muslims.

Other important writers of stories were and are Jatindramohan Sinha, Surendranath Majumdar, Bibhuti Bhushan Bhatta, Saroj Kumari Devi and Prabodh Ghosh.

The two most famous names in juvenile fiction were Upendra Kishore Ray Choudhury and Jogindranath Sarkar. Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar is another writer whose folk-tales have been a source of infinite delight to children.

The Present Scenario

As society evolves and time progresses, the ethos of every era and art produced in that era also evolves. For example, when Bankim wrote, the chief concern was how to restore national self-respect. In Rabindranath's time it was how to bridge the gulf between the East and the West. In the present dynamic age, the question is how to identify ourselves with the

common people.

Before the nineteenth century the majority of writers lived in the villages, their works were read and performed at the village gatherings. There was no schism between the author and his public. However, post the phenomena of urbanization and the printing-press, the writers are largely isolated from the common masses. Though books circulate more widely they are known less intimately. They are accessed only by the privileged classes, and the illiterate and underprivileged are cut off from the intellectual life of the times as never before. Consequently, there is no enlightened and forceful public opinion outside the large towns anymore.

Amidst the turbulent times of the post-world war era, the soldier--poet Kazi Nazrul Islam appeared in the scene of Bengali literature and revolutionized it even further. A born rebel, he gave voice to the new spirit of a defiant nationalism. His *Vidrohi* (The Rebel) summed up the feelings of his generation. Mixing with workers and peasants he sought to arouse their inner passion too. Later, when communalism raised its ugly head and fouled the atmosphere with its poisonous breath, the poet felt disillusioned.

Muslim writers, as the mention of Kazi Nazrul Islam shows, have not only fallen into line with the writers of other communities but achieved distinction on their own merit. Since they were still not affected by the city life, they shared close affinity with Nature and that supplied a refreshing sense of vigor in their writings.

Jasimuddin is more a son of the soil

than a child of the age. His long narrative poems of village life are comparable to the *Mymensingh Ballads* in their tragic sense and homely atmosphere if not in their intensity of living. His writings do justice to the lived realities of the "dumb millions". Mahbubul Alam, author of a remarkable series of reminiscences, is also a lover of the people. He finds such pleasure and peace in their company that he cares nothing for the sham that passes for civilization and deplores its inroads on their nature wise way of life. Kazi Abdul Wadud was another figure who was a critic of life as well as of literature, and had an integrated view of reality. His discourse on religion, philosophy, politics and social reform with an unbiased understanding transcends all frontiers. Humayun Kabir was another noteworthy poet and critic of his time. Abdul Mansur Ahmed had thrown himself into political journalism on the side of the peasants. Always an entertaining essayist, he was a brilliant satirist as well. Abu Saiyid Ayub was another remarkable intellectual. His essays shed light on philosophical subjects meant for the ordinary public, and he was of the Marxist persuasion. There were two more important essayists who shared the same name, Wazed Ali.

Among other Muslim authors mention should be made of the poets Gholam Mustapha, Abdul Kadir, Mohiuddin and Bande Ali; the essayists Mohammed Shahidulla, Motaher Hussain Chaudhury and Shamsun Nahar, editor of *Bulbul*; and the novelists, Abul Fazl and Mansuruddin. Among these important names Mansuruddin was better known for his collection of folk-songs.

Another marked feature of the period

was the way women writers had come forward and taken their rightful places. They did not ask for sympathetic or privileged consideration or any special treatment but a level-playing field.

Santa Devi and Sita Devi were probably the first to portray the struggles of a college-educated girl and her difficulties in a hetero-patriarchal society governed by customs and blind inhibitions. Nirupama Devi (Rani) had shown equal courage in her life and her poetry, preferring hardship and struggle to a comfortable social position and wealth. Uma Devi, in whom a calm reflective vision mastered spiritual unrest, died prematurely after producing poems and stories full of promise. Radharani Devi, another poet, came into prominence through her impassioned advocacy for feminism. She was married to the well-known writer Narendra Dev. Aparajita Devi, whose identity is still a matter of conjecture, is famous for her light humorous verse with its wistful, half-concealed undertone of sorrow. Prabhavati Devi was another noteworthy fiction writer. There is much sadness in her tales and a suggestion of revolt.

Others deserving mention are Lila Majumdar Jyotirmayi Devi, Sophia Khatun, Suruchibala Ray, Ashalata Sinha and Jyotirmala Devi and so on who displayed enough courage to come forward and write publicly about their experiences and thoughts.

Apart from talking about individual writers, any discussion on Bengali literature must include mention of this particular magazine named *Kallol* and the group of writers associated with

the magazine. This particular group was heavily disillusioned by the post-war experiences, frustrations of the unemployment, the injustices of the social system and the inhumanity of fellow citizens towards each other. Many of them had no belief in God or religion either. Even hollow talks of patriotism could not motivate them. They had their dreams of a new kind of society which would be the Utopia of their desire. They were 'realists. Gokul Chandra Nag, who was the soul of this group, died young, leaving behind him a remarkable novel called *Pathik* (The Wayfarer). Despite the hurling together of too many plots and sub-plots, he succeeded in creating some unforgettable characters against the background of the Non-Cooperation Movement through this work. Achintya Kumar Sengupta and Premendra Mitra, both of them distinguished novelists, poets and short story writers served their apprenticeship with the Kallol. Achintya is ironical and inclined to cynicism, while Premendra is a broken-hearted dreamer, still hoping for the best from the idea of revolution.

Another important magazine was Kali Kalam magazine. Sailajananda Mukherjee, associated with it has written many romances that critiqued his contemporary social order. Equally social and romantic was Prabodh Kumar Sanyal of the Swadesh magazine group. His stories are thronged with impetuous men and women aflame with passion or consumed by a restless longing for something afar.

Then there was Pragati magazine which was led by Buddhadev Bose. Bose edited *Kavita*, a periodical devoted to verse. Buddhadev was at once a poet, an essayist and a novelist, noted for his brilliance rather than depth. Among the contributors to *Kavita* are the poets Jivanananda Das Gupta, Amiya Chandra Chakravarti and Samar Sen. All of them are original to the point of eccentricity. Ajit Kumar Dutta of the same group had classical tastes. Dissentients from the *Kavita* had formed themselves into another group led by Premendra Mitra and Sanjay Bhattacharya. They had a poetry magazine called *Nirukta*.

Sudhindranath Datta, another noteworthy name was associated with the *Parichaya*. He had his apprenticeship and 'Wanderjahre' in foreign lands; yet his style was largely classical and his diction, Sanskritic. Largely influenced by Western thoughts, he was nihilistic in his outlook. Nearest to him was Vishnu De, though not exactly of the same set. Vishnu was a symbolist whose mind wavered between T.S. Eliot and Karl Marx. His poems were notable for their music. He in his turn is nearest to Subhas Mukherjee, a whole hearted communist whose poetry was a call to action.

Philosophical nihilism is also in a way the kernel of the poems of Sajanikanta Das, editor of the popular magazine *Sanibarar Chithi*. With him are associated two or three other powerful writers. Tarasankar Banerjee is perhaps the most popular novelist. Drawn from rural sources, his characters were unmistakably alive and real. His outlook on life is vigorous, marked by certain bewilderment at the social changes taking place around him. Balaichand Mukherjee who wrote under the name 'Banaphul' was a doctor by profession. Interestingly, he drew his characters on the acquaintances that he had in real life with people. He was a poet and a playwright of originality and his tone was marked by pessimism probably because he was drawing his characters from real people who had real issues to deal with. Pramathanath Bishi of this group was equally skilled in prose, verse and play. The better-known writers of Bengali fiction independent of any coterie are Manindralal Bose, Dilip Kumar Ray, Bibhuti Bhusan Banerjee and Manik Banerjee. Manindralal Bose was the spokesperson of the young idealists, who, as citizens of the world, dreamed of a utopic time when beauty, justice and scientific temperament would reign human logic. The musician Dilip Kumar Roy, who spent the post-war years in Europe and made intimate contacts there, was another novelist of some repute whose

heroes and heroines were cosmopolitans. After a point disillusionment drove Roy to Pondicherry where he regained his soul and redeemed his literary excellence. Bibhuti Bhusan Banerjee leapt into flame as the author of the iconic Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road), the record of a child's unfolding, told with great charm and fidelity. His novels are pervaded with nostalgia for a vanishing world. His wanderings provided him with endless material for stories. Manik Banerjee was another enigmatic writer of Bengal. He had the surreal quality of transforming the ordinary into something dreamy which at the same time fascinated and weirded out the readers.

Of the independent poets Sudhir Kumar Chaudhury, Hemendralal Ray, Hemchandra Bagchi, Manish Ghatak and Nishikanta Ray Choudhury are the better known.

Coming to well-known humorists, were the names of Bibhuti Bhusan Mukherjee and Sivaram Chakravarti have to be mentioned. Both wrote stories, the latter chiefly for children. Another was Rabindranath Maitra who later matured into a delightful dramatist.

Among the playwrights whose works have literary value are Sachindranath Sengupta and Jogesh Chandra Chaudhury. In the world of short stories, an expanding universe, names of Jagadish Gupta, Asamanja Mukherjee, Ashish Gupta, Manoj Bose, Gajendra Kumar Mitra and Subodh Ghosh must be acknowledged. The stories of the last named have social significance and of the first, sensuous appeal. Rakhai Chandra Sen gave us some extraordinary stories as well. Coming to the genre of novels, mention must be made of Premankur Atarhi, Narendra Dev, Saroj Kumar Ray Choudhury and Jivanmay Ray, who were all excellent writers in their own ways.

However, compared to the previous era, the art of essay writing has suffered as many capable essayists have neglected it for either fiction or journalism. Nonetheless, worthy of note are Charuchandra Datta, Satyendranath Majumdar, Prabodh Chatterjee, Prafulla Kumar Sarkar, Abaninath Ray, Hiran Kumar Sanyal, Shyamal Krishna Ghosh, Nandagopal Sen Gupta, Gopal Haldar and Jyotirmay Ray. Charuchandra's reminiscences are a rich repast.

Conclusion

The above discussion clearly points out the rich and variegated history of Bengali literature—its genesis, evolution and flowering into contemporary forms. The presence of a rich literary tradition is dependent upon a rich, complex and developed language. The presence of written literature in the form of *Caryāpada* in 7th century AD and the prevalence of oral traditions point towards the history of Bengali language starting at least two thousand years back. Therefore, based on the literary evidence we can fairly claim the classical status of the Bengali language.

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Contributors

Amitava Das

Professor, School of Linguistic Studies, ILSR, Kolkata. Known for his research in narratology, linguistic shifts, and Bangla language, literature, and culture, he led the preparation of the claim paper—a significant ILSR initiative on behalf of the Government of West Bengal—that secured classical status for the Bangla language. He has nearly three decades of teaching experience at Vidyasagar University, Jadavpur University, and Burdwan University.

Rajat Sanyal

Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta. His areas of interest include Early Medieval Archaeology, Eastern Indian Epigraphy, Archaeology of Indian Buddhism, History of Geopolitics in early India and Environmental History. Currently, as an official collaborator of the ERC Synergy Project on DHARMA (<https://dharma.hypotheses.org/people>), he is preparing a database of dedicatory inscriptions of eastern India.

Rajib Chakraborty

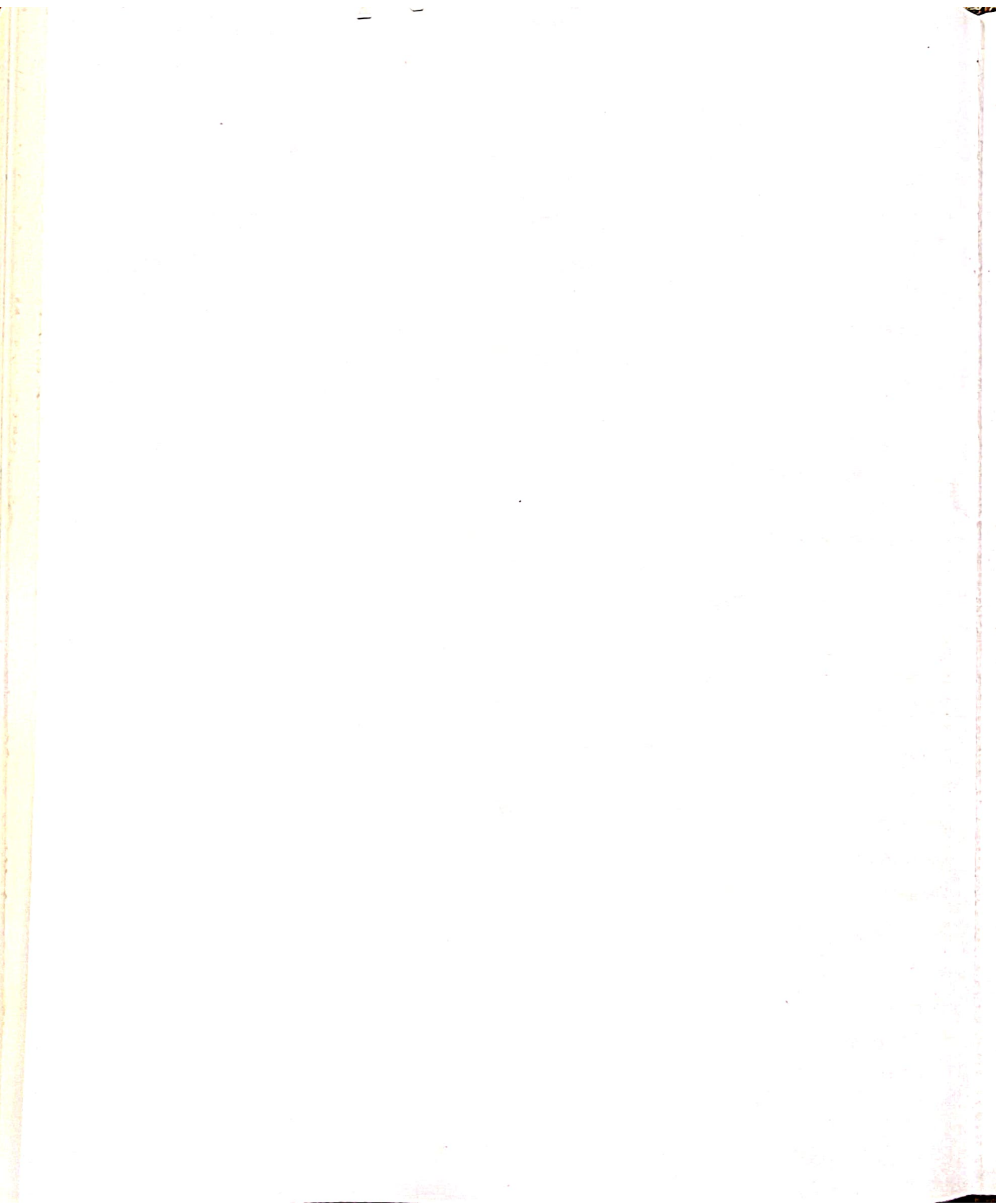
Linguist, Society for Natural Language Technology Research, Department of Information Technology & Electronics, Govt. of West Bengal. He is also an adjunct faculty in School of Linguistic Studies, ILSR, Kolkata. He is also an archivist by passion. His areas of research interests include Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Lexicography, Culture studies, and Digital sound archiving.

Sayak Basu

Researcher in Bangla literature and culture. His areas of research interests include scientific terminology of Bangla, cultural ethos of Bengal and lexicography.

Somnath Chakraborty

Guest Lecturer, Dept. of Sanskrit, Sanskrit College and University (Nabadwip Campus). His areas of research interests include Sanskrit Language and Grammar; Ancient Indian History, Epigraphy, Palaeography; Manuscriptology.





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